Guitar MAGAZINE

JULY 2019
ISSUE 370
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IS **GIBSON'S**
60TH ANNIVERSARY
1959 **LES PAUL**
THE BEST R9 **EVER?**

ICONS

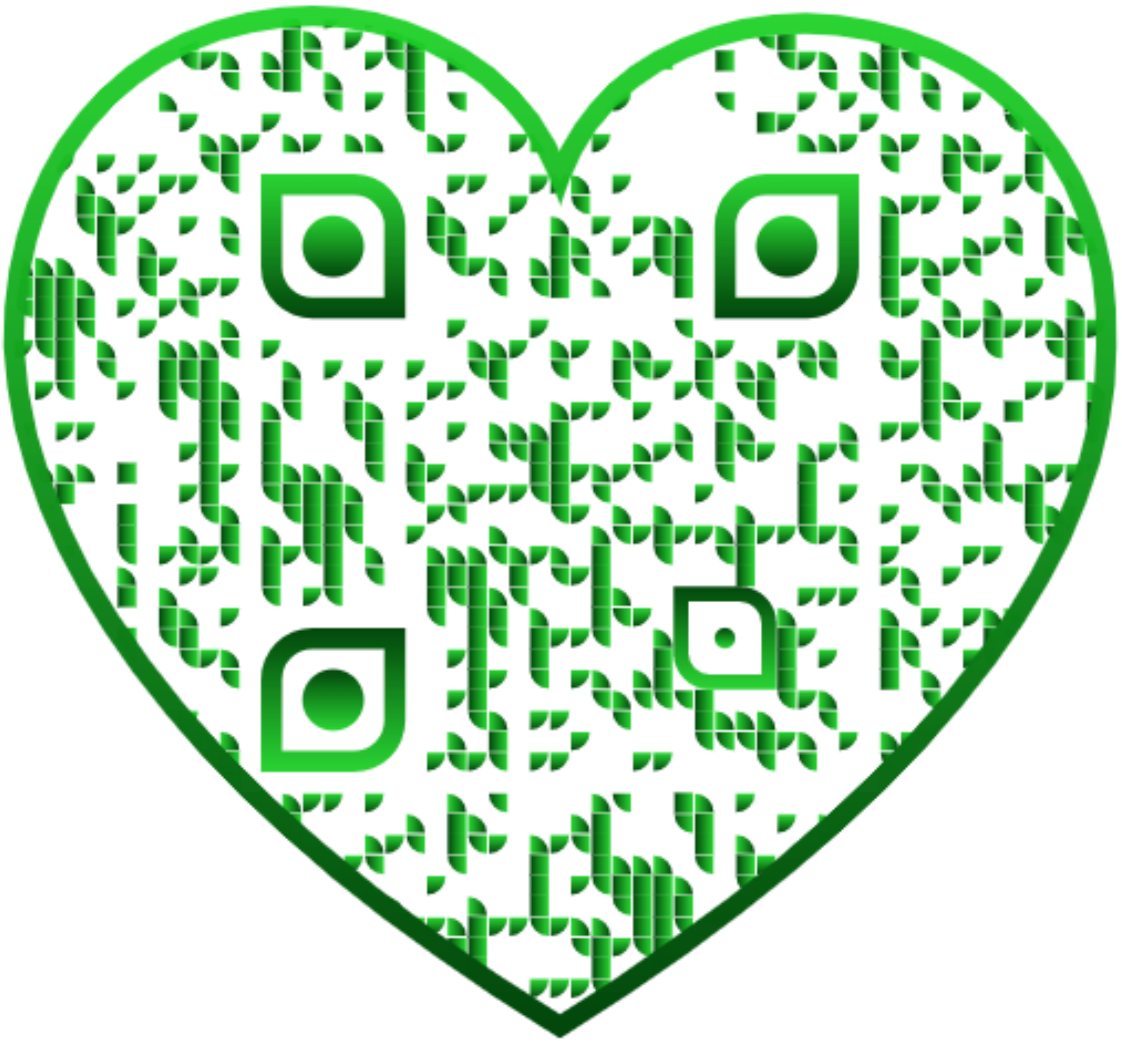
STARRING

RORY GALLAGHER'S
BLUES MACHINES

JIMMY PAGE'S
LED ZEPPELIN GEAR

KIEFER SUTHERLAND
TALKS GUITAR

PLAY ARPEGGIOS
LIKE **JOHNNY MARR**



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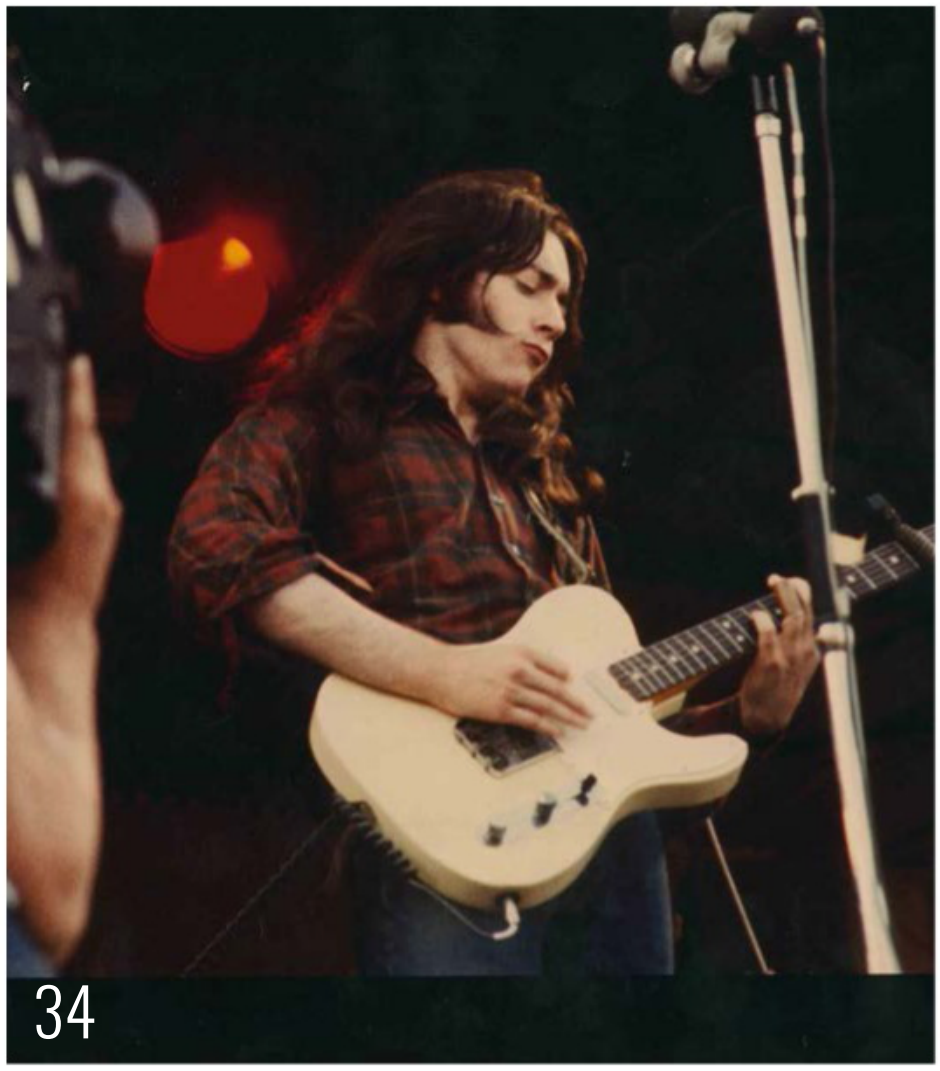
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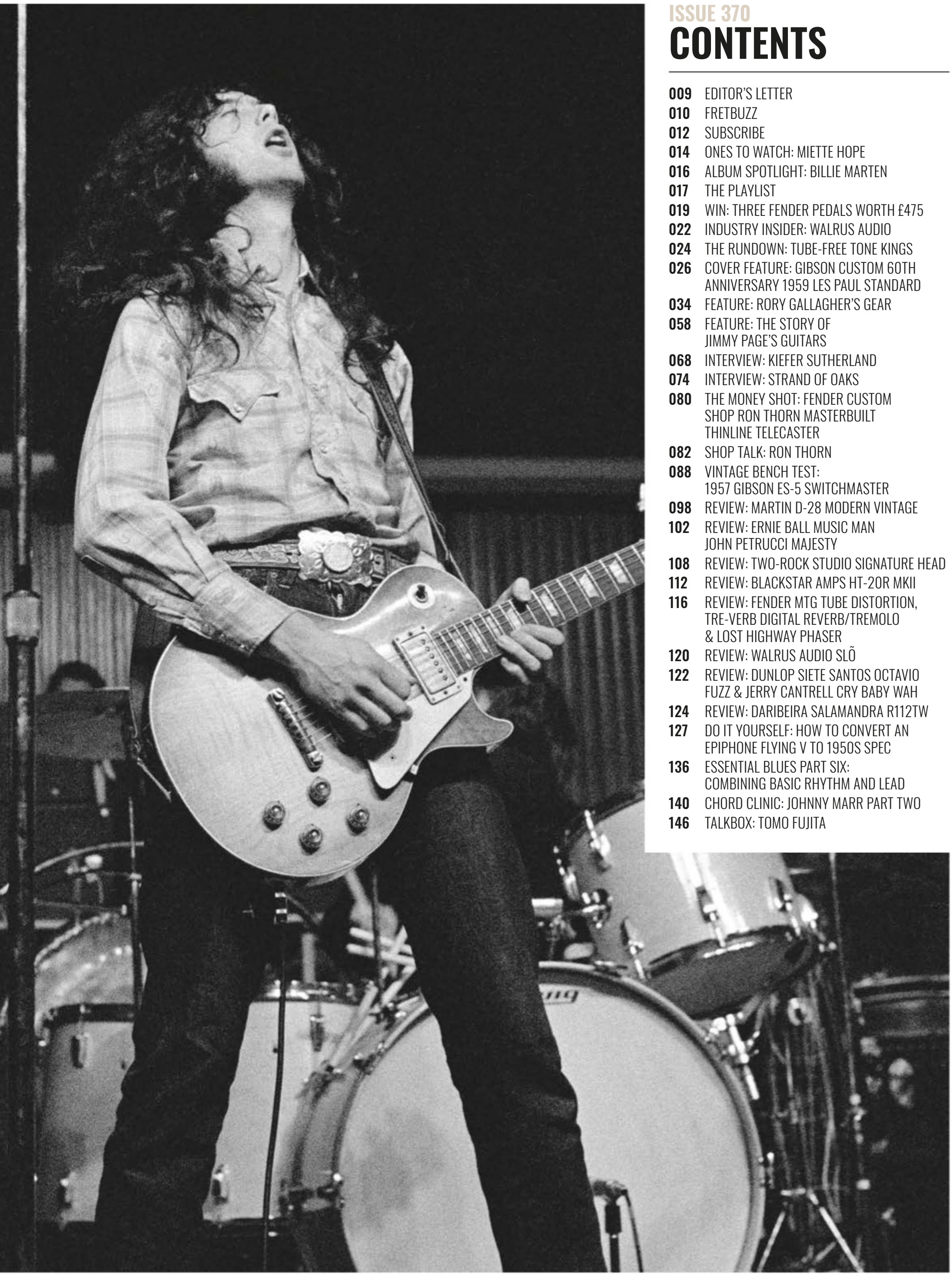

ISSUE 370

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BandLab UK Limited
Unit 7, Riverside Court,
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EDITORIAL

CHIEF EDITOR Chris Vinnicombe
ART EDITOR John Thackray
MANAGING EDITOR Josh Gardner
PRODUCTION EDITOR Owen Bailey
SENIOR PRODUCT SPECIALIST Huw Price
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Sam Roberts
INSTRUMENT & COVER PHOTOGRAPHY Eleanor Jane
CONTRIBUTORS Tony Bacon, Richard Barrett, Darran Charles, Rod Fogg, Leigh Fuge, Dave Hunter, Jo Johnson, Richard Purvis, Michael Watts
HAVE A STORY? Email us at editors@guitar.com

SALES

ADVERTISING MANAGER Joe Supple
joe.supple@guitar.com
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER Di Marsh
di.marsh@guitar.com

PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS

PRINT William Gibbons & Sons Ltd
DISTRIBUTED BY Marketforce (UK) Ltd
5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Meng Ru Kuok
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Ivan Chen
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER Tom Callahan
AVP, WEB TECHNOLOGIES Laurent Le Graverend
AVP, COMMS & PARTNERSHIPS Lauren Hendry Parsons
SENIOR MANAGER, BRAND STRATEGY Krystle Hall
MANAGER, EDITORIAL STRATEGY Iliyas Ong
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Terence Stanley
STAFF WRITER Daniel Ong

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

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EDITOR'S LETTER

OF STAGE AND SCREEN

What makes an icon? This month's magazine features a collection of subjects that have inspired their fair share of devotion over the years. Listen to any of their greatest albums or live recordings and you'll hear Rory Gallagher and Jimmy Page stamp their authority over a piece of music from the outset.

Both players brought a potent cocktail of guile and abandon to the table and both could be graceful or explosive when required. We get up close with some of the guitars and amps that powered Rory's passionate take on the blues in a massive 20-page feature that begins on p34, including rare instruments from his archive that you won't see anywhere else.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Page's most important Led Zeppelin gear is charted from p58 onwards, with insights from the man himself and original photography from some of the band's landmark early shows in Scandinavia.

Our coverstar is Gibson's latest nod to the most iconic blues-rock guitar of them all: the 1959 Les Paul Standard. Six decades on from the year in which Gibson perfected its greatest solidbody, the newly rejuvenated company has released what might be its best Burst reissue yet. Head to p26 to find out how it fares – in all honesty, it was tough to tear myself away from the guitar for long enough to write the review!

Another icon featured this month may be more familiar for his work in film and television than in the recording studio, but make no mistake, Kiefer Sutherland is as crazy about guitars as the rest of us. Find out about the parallels he sees in storytelling through acting and music in our interview, beginning on p68.

It's a packed issue, but don't forget to head to *Guitar.com* for plenty more of the latest news, features, opinion and reviews. See you next month, when we'll hopefully save you a trip to the luthier…

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

ARE FRIENDS ELECTRIC?

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I can never understand the following:

1. Why do people enjoy social eating? Food is fuel, you don't need to make polite conversation…
2. Why do people like dancing? What's all that about?
3. Why do saxophone players think they are so good, playing monophonic tone machines?

But the one that really gets me is… Why do guitarists have to put pickups in acoustic guitars? If you want to go electric, plug in your Strat, or your Les Paul, for that matter…

ANDREW S REDDING, ROTHERHAM, UK

We're perhaps not the best qualified people to discuss your first three observations, Andrew, but there are very good reasons to have a pickup system in an acoustic guitar. There's still no substitute for high-quality microphone when recording, but if you want to play acoustic music live to audiences of more than about 20 people, you simply have to find a way to amplify your guitar, and a pickup system is the cheapest, most practical and most controllable solution. Ever tried playing *Blackbird* on a Les Paul? It just doesn't cut the mustard. That said, hybrid instruments are edging ever closer to the 'real thing', so perhaps one day soon you'll flick a switch and that Les Paul will mimic a pre-war D-28 with startling accuracy.

KICKING OFFSET

Dear *GM*, I wanted to drop you a line to say that I really enjoyed The Offset Issue. After years of being a Stratocaster devotee, I first dipped my toe in those comfy offset waters about five years ago. Not knowing whether it would turn out to be a long-lasting liaison or just a brief flirtation, I opted for an Indonesian-made Squier Jazzmaster for the princely sum of £250.

Despite my misgivings about how good this guitar would be, once treated to a fret-dress, set-up (thanks for all those tips over the years, Huw Price!) and a set of heavier strings, it's a pretty damn good instrument!

My only modifications have been those heavier gauge strings and a generic Mustang-style bridge for £15 off eBay. On this particular incarnation of Jazzmaster that loose vibrato arm is an easy fix: lay the guitar flat on the carpet, be brave and press that arm in really hard where it enters the collet. It goes in and stays in. Job done!

I'm now finding that I pick up that Jazzmaster more often than my Strats. It's not only a lot more comfortable to play, but that vibrato mechanism is so smooth and the arm falls so much more readily to hand than that of the Strat. I've definitely become an offset convert!

STEPHEN DAVIES, VIA EMAIL

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

Ron Thorn is an awesome luthier and a fine gentleman! I own several of his guitars.

KEITH HIBBITTS, FACEBOOK

I got to hold Clarence White's Telecaster last year and I literally felt an energy in it. Unplugged, it resonated through me… I think it changed my body chemistry!

WILL MCFARLANE, FACEBOOK

I'm proud to have a '61 Strat, which is the same year as Rory's… but it certainly hasn't been played in like his!

MICHAEL BENNAN, INSTAGRAM

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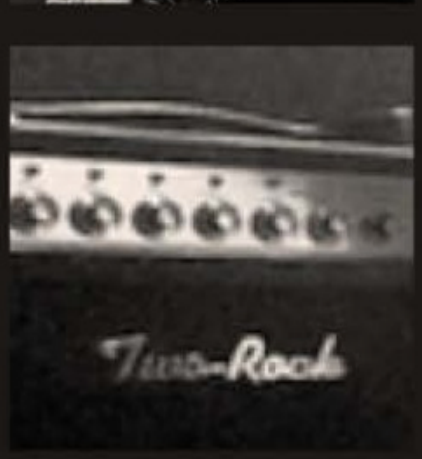

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“I HAD OTHER INTERESTS, BUT MY PASSION FOR MUSIC FELT LIKE NOTHING ELSE I’D KNOWN. IT HELPED ME THROUGH HARD TIMES AS A CHILD AND I USED SONGWRITING AS A FORM OF THERAPY”

ONES TO WATCH

MIETTE HOPE @MIETTEHOPE

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER **PHOTOGRAPHY** DUSTIN COHEN

Talented US singer-songwriter Miette Hope has already graduated from Berklee, played with Brian Wilson and made waves in the New York jazz scene – and she's done it all with an entry-level Epiphone in her hands…

When did you first discover the guitar?
"My mom has been playing and singing in bands since before I was born, so there were always instruments in the house. I grew up in a mountain town in the heart of Colorado and was exposed to folk and bluegrass early on. I taught myself some chords and wrote my first song on my parents' guitar when I was 10.

"There was never a question in my mind about whether or not I wanted to play music. I had other interests of course, but my passion for music felt like nothing else I had known. It helped me through hard times as a child and I used songwriting as a form of therapy."

You were the first-ever Vans Presidential Scholar at Berklee College Of Music…
"When I applied for Berklee, I knew that the only way I could attend would be on scholarship. The year I won was the first time that Vans had collaborated with Berklee to sponsor an incoming student. I wouldn't have been able to live my dreams if it hadn't been for their generosity and for that I will forever be grateful. I gained so much from getting an education in music. Berklee is such a unique place where you can access so many different types of music from all around the world. The staff and students are incredibly inspiring and pushed me beyond my comfort zone."

While you were at Berklee, you opened for Brian Wilson while in the band Aüva…
"That was an incredible experience. It was the 50th anniversary reunion tour for *Pet Sounds*. The Beach Boys were a big inspiration for the music I wrote with Aüva, so it felt like a very full-circle moment to have that opportunity. The show was also our last date on a two-week DIY tour of the East Coast, and so it was very rewarding after sleeping on couches and sitting in a van for hours with five guys!"

Your guitar style is rhythmically very interesting, where did that come from?
"Rhythm is a very important part of my music, I can often hear a drum or bass groove in my head before I start playing the chords. I'm self-taught on guitar and I never really learned how to use a pick, so I think the improper technique actually adds an interesting element to my sound!"

Your guitar choice – a brown Epiphone Dot Studio – is very unassuming for a professional musician…
"It's the first guitar I ever owned. My step-dad gifted it to me for my 15th birthday – I've had it for almost 10 years now. I think more than anything, it is nostalgic for me. I've grown up with it both as a musician and person – it's always been there for me like an old friend. The neck has snapped and been repaired a few times but she still plays really well considering what she's been through – I think it adds character!"

Your songwriting seems to come from a very raw place…
"I usually feel most inspired to write when I am processing something emotionally. Songwriting helps me to understand how I really feel about my experiences in life and I try to express that in my music as authentically as possible.

"I have a three-song EP coming out called *Pendulum* that I worked on over the span of three days with a good friend and producer who goes by the alias Ariza. The project is deeply personal to me as it is meant to express the different stages of grief in my experience of losing my father to his addiction. I'm currently working on the visuals for the project and I plan to release all three as a short film this fall."

In a time when so much music is written and recorded electronically, why is the guitar still important to you?
"The guitar has a sound that just can't be fabricated. I think it's really important to keep those organic sounds present in both my recordings and live shows. For me, the guitar feels like an extension of myself when I'm performing and it gives my audience the experience of my songs how I originally wrote them."

For more information, visit miettehope.com

THE PLAYLIST

© Katie Silvester

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

BILLIE MARTEN FEEDING SEAHORSES BY HAND

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The critically acclaimed teenager takes us on a more introspective and refined journey on *Feeding Seahorses By Hand*, recorded at the home of acclaimed producer Ethan Johns…

Although Billie Marten sometimes sings of a need for boldness or confidence, she always seems to do so with articulacy that belies her age. Still only 19, her sophomore record is bursting with intricate guitar lines and maturing lyrical topics. Here, the Ripon native talks about her favourite guitar excerpts from her second full-length LP….

BOXES

"We really layered things up on this song. Everything. I think there were two or three electrics, acoustic, electric bass, overdubs, along with all the synth-y thickness and various drums to make a proper meaty sound. For electric songs, I always use my '83 Tele Elite, which is supposed to be for people who are very good at mega solos – but I find it works so smoothly for picking, like at the end of this song for the coda part. But when you crank it up, the chords still sound thick as well."

BAD APPLE

"Because everything was recorded on four-track tape, we did add a bit of reversing. It's a classic Beatles/T. Rex manoeuvre, but I just love the sound. So the very start of this one is actually me singing a small bit of Radiohead's *Nude*. Ethan went nuts on the electric playing high up on the neck in rapid lines which, reversed, sounds like a horde of mice scuttling round or something! I loved that texture, it doesn't quite fit, but it's not grating or distracting."

TOULOUSE

"*Toulouse* is mellow. It's driven by this Moog beat we created that's quite gritty, so I wanted the guitar sound to be smooth and sweet – hence the acoustic this time. I guess the song itself is rather basic, in that it uses a classic structure and melody, so to make it too modern would sound odd. We always double-track and pan for the thickness and to get that closeness in your headphones. I did a little harmony line on a classical, which sound great always. The best is the £19.99 'my first classical' type from Argos, we used that all over the first album!"

BETSY

"I couldn't even figure out for a while how to play it on guitar all the way through by myself. The main line of two notes sliding runs until the end, as thicker chords come in for the chorus. It's done on co-producer Rich Cooper's Tele, through a little Vibro Champ mic'd up at his place. We also added that rhythmic acoustic which reminded me of *Empire Of The Sun* a little."

BLUE SEA, RED SEA

"A basis of acoustics piled on top of each other, with that line in the choruses sliding up and down. It wasn't done with a slide, though, we tuned it up and down very quickly in time which was an unnecessary effort, but enjoyable. It's country-inspired, I guess, without planning it to be." G

Feeding Seahorses By Hand **by Billie Marten is out now on Sony Music**

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers…

BIFFY CLYRO
Balance Not Symmetry
A surprise release from a soundtrack of the same name, the Scottish arena-rockers are reinvigorated here. Angular riffs and esoteric percussion abound on the title track.

THE BLACK KEYS
Go
A back-to-basics rocker from Auerbach and Carney sees them fit comfortably between the *Attack & Release* and *El Camino* eras, with catchy riffs and a singalong chorus.

SLIPKNOT
Unsainted
Taken from new LP *We Are Not Your Kind*, Corey Taylor's signature vocals are backed by brutal drumming, before Jim Root and Mick Thomson bring the merciless riffery.

MAC DEMARCO
All Of Our Yesterdays
Indie's prodigal son has released his fourth long player and this track provides the perfect, lilting vibrato guitar to soundtrack your barbecues in the park this summer.

YONAKA
Don't Wait 'Til Tomorrow
Yonaka are another band reinventing British guitar music. The title track from their self-produced debut features filtered lead lines between Theresa Jarvis's sultry vocals.

THE AMAZONS
25
Guitar solos abound on the Reading natives' sophomore record, taking influence from rock 'n' roll's finest in the form of Led Zeppelin, Howlin' Wolf and others.

THE RACONTEURS
Help Me Stranger
Opening with Jack White's trademark psychedelic blues, this evolves into a sinewy groove with hairy lead inflections and acoustic guitars.

SWIMMING TAPES
Keep Her Closer
These five friends from Northern Ireland offer a respite from the recent punk resurgence, turning their hand to expertly crafted American-style indie.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
There Goes My Miracle
The second single from new album *Western Stars*, this pays homage to 60s stalwarts Glen Campbell and Burt Bacharach with a string section and The Boss's soaring vocals.

THE NATIONAL
Rylan
Played live sporadically in recent years, *Rylan* has now been given a full studio rendering on *I Am Easy To Find*, with thunderous, gated drums and vocal harmonies.

THE HIVES
I'm Alive
The Hives are back with their first original material in over four years. Strung-out chords open the track before falling into huge guitar stabs and weighty drums.

JAMES BAY
Rescue
From his surprise EP *Oh My Messy Mind*, Bay turns away from pop and towards chugging guitars, blues-and-country-inspired lead lines and gospel backing vocals.

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You can read our in-depth review on p116, but in the meantime, here's the skinny: the MTG Tube Distortion makes use of a fully functioning vacuum tube in the form of an NOS 6205 preamp valve, while also sporting a three-band EQ and a switchable boost with its own independent control knobs.

Fender's tremolo-and-reverb combination pedal, the aptly named Tre-Verb, features three modes per side. Tremolo modes include a 60s-inspired optical voice alongside bias and harmonic vibrato options, covering small power-amp tremolo and vintage Brownface-style wobble, too. It also features three reverb settings, two of which are rooted in the 60s, with a '63 and '65 setting respectively. The third option comes in the form of a plate reverb, delivering a smoother and more spacious studio-style sound.

Finally, the Lost Highway Phaser is an all-analogue four- and eight-stage phaser, adding simple and luscious modulation to your 'board in a small form factor. Included are rate and depth controls, a slow/fast switch plus a toggle that switches between sine and triangle waveforms, adding even more depth to your tonal options. All three are made with Fender's sleek, anodised-aluminium enclosure and feature LEDs on each knob, to ensure you know exactly where you are no matter how dark the stage.

Head to Fender.com for more. For a chance to win this great prize, visit the link below and answer the following question: guitar.com/news/competitions/fender-pedals/

Which of the following is not part of the range of Fender effects pedals?
A Full Moon Distortion **B** The Pelt Fuzz **C** Corona Compressor

The closing date for the competition is 12.00am GMT, 1 July 2019. Good luck!

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WALRUS AUDIO

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

Oklahoma-based Walrus Audio has quickly become one of the most beloved and respected names in the effects world. We speak to company president, Colt Westbrook, about rising to the top of the boutique pile…

How did you get into guitar?
"I grew up as a pastor's kid in Oklahoma. The music minister of our church happened to be an incredible guitarist. He gave a group of us boys one hour of jazz lessons and one hour of 'jam' lessons every week, for years. It was serendipitous that I happened to have an opportunity like that in a small college town, but I am so thankful for it."

When did you start tinkering with gear?
"My first experience modding gear was thumbing through a *Musician's Friend* catalogue as an 11-year-old. I saw a listing for 'DiMarzio Distortion Pickups' and thought, 'Man, that's a great idea. I could have distortion on at *all times*!' I bought them and soldered them in with my dad's soldering iron, plugged it in to hear that sweet distortion 'inside' the pickups… well… no cigar. I went to re-read the listing to find out 'Distortion Pickups' means they have a super-hot output to hit the amp hard, not provide always-on distortion. A first failure, but that's what got me into gear."

Did Walrus get any initial help when you were starting out?
"Walrus started out with an initial investor. We've since parted ways and they're onto bigger and better things, but it provided us with an opportunity to develop top-shelf gear at a healthy rate, creating a lot of buzz in the MI world and with artists I grew up listening to."

At what point did you feel like you 'nailed' your branding?
"Never! I have a few campaigns that were my favourite, but we're always tweaking and doing things we think are improvements. My favourite campaigns to date are the Luminary Quad Octave, 385 Overdrive and Monument Tremolo."

What's your best-selling product?
"The Julia Chorus/Vibrato is one of our top-sellers. What pedal company plans on having a chorus as a top-moving product? Probably none. It was a complete happy accident. We started to hear chorus coming back into indie-rock and the Top 40 since its hibernation in the late 90s. The Julia was us messing around with sounds that inspired us and it seems to have inspired many others as well."

What's your proudest moment to date?
"We film a series for YouTube called *Songs At The Shop*. It's a moment when bands we love and sponsor come in to film one of their favourite songs from their catalogue in our warehouse. We got Mutemath to say yes to filming one, but they were playing in Tulsa, which is 100 miles from our shop.

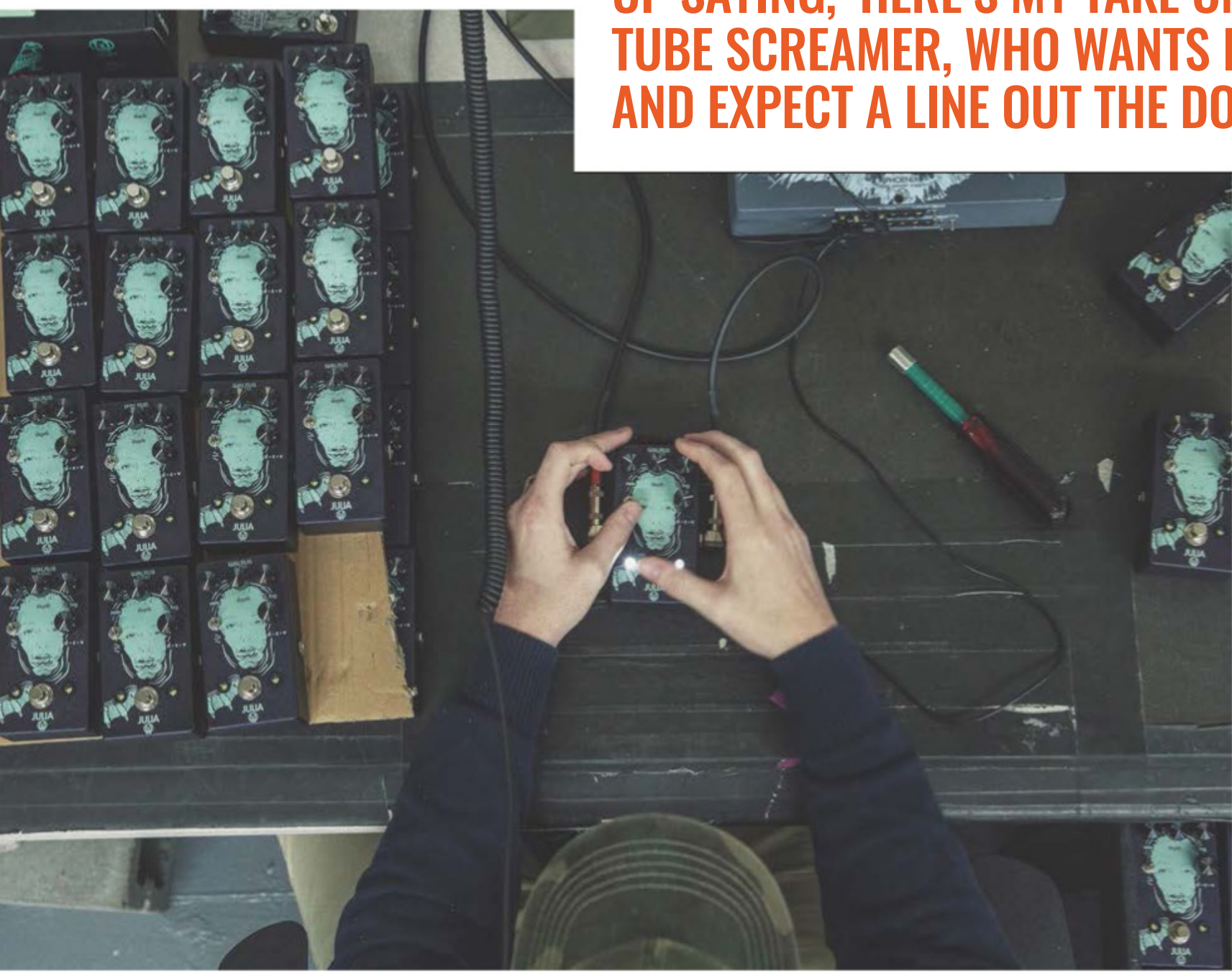
"We still wanted to film it, so we thought hard about how to make it work. I called a buddy in Tulsa, Isaac Hanson from the band Hanson, who happened to have a studio across the street from the venue where Mutemath was playing. I asked him if there was any way a band, a film crew and a few fans could crash the studio and film some music videos and he was electric about the idea! It was when I was watching and listening to Mutemath play through the songs in Hanson's studio in downtown Tulsa that I thought, 'Yeah man, this is cool.'"

What are the guitar industry's biggest challenges and opportunities in 2019?
"The biggest challenge is making gear that people need. There are so many pedal companies now that you can't just hold something up saying, 'Here's my take on the Tube Screamer, who wants it!?' and expect a line out the door like you could in 2010. You have to work tirelessly to make gear that offers something innovative… Which I think is a good thing, because I enjoy the challenge."

Can you give us any details of your plans for the future?
"The future is huge. We'll keep up what we're known for, but in the next couple years, we are reaching for higher goals." G

For more on Walrus Audio, visit walrusaudio.com

“THERE ARE SO MANY PEDAL COMPANIES NOW. YOU CAN’T JUST HOLD SOMETHING UP SAYING, ‘HERE’S MY TAKE ON THE TUBE SCREAMER, WHO WANTS IT!?’ AND EXPECT A LINE OUT THE DOOR”



ABOVE The Walrus Audio range has expanded swiftly, and Nathan Price’s distinctive artwork takes inspiration from animated films

LEFT Walrus Audio hand-builds and manufactures its pedals in the US

THE RUNDOWN

TUBE-FREE TONE KINGS

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

Once upon a time, tube tone was all that mattered to guitar players. But in 2019, there are many ways to sound great without a glass bottle in sight, whether at home or on the stage…

ROLAND JC-120 JAZZ CHORUS

1 This most iconic of solid-state amplifiers is still going strong today, thanks in no small part to the huge list of star players who have fallen for the Jazz Chorus since it was first launched back in 1975. The JC-120 really hit its straps in the 1980s, when hitmakers from all ends of the spectrum relied on the amp's idiosyncratic, crystalline cleans – from Andy Summers and Robert Smith to Kirk Hammett and James Hetfield.

BOSS KATANA ARTIST

3 Boss might not have a huge pedigree when it comes to guitar amps, but the Japanese pedal giant has made up for that in recent years with its digital Katana range. The variety and quality of the Katanas' sounds, combined with their portability and affordability, has made the amps a hit with guitarists of many stripes, but this top-line Artist model utilises Waza Craft expertise in the shape of the 12-inch Waza Craft G12W speaker.

ORANGE CRUSH 35RT

5 Orange's Crush range represents some of the best bang-for-buck fun in all of guitardom, and over the years, the Brit company has continued to refine and improve the line to ensure the authentic Orange experience isn't limited to classic looks. The giggable 35RT is a wonderful case in point – offering classic British rock tones, with its built-in reverb and tuner making it an even more impressive proposition.

MARSHALL CODE 100

2 Marshall has produced solid-state and hybrid amps consistently over the decades, but the amp giant took its time getting into the modelling game, not testing the waters until 2016. When the CODE series finally arrived, it came with a selection of classic Marshall tones onboard and a wonderfully simple, user-friendly interface.

BLACKSTAR ID:CORE STEREO 100

4 Blackstar's ID:Core range has become a go-to for entry-level players looking for great tone and versatility on a budget. The ID:Core Stereo 100 takes the smaller amps' six built-in voices, Super Wide Stereo sound, digital effects, deep editing and patch storage via its Insider software, USB recording and reamping – and puts it in a loud, light and giggable 100-watt combo.

FENDER MUSTANG GT 100

6 Fender's history with modelling amps goes all the way back to the original Cyber-Twin from 2001, so it should come as no surprise that the company's current flagship modeller, the Mustang GT, is so impressive for the money. Offering a wealth of modelled amp sounds from inside and outside of the Fender stable, artist presets, app-based control and wifi connectivity to update the software and add new features, the Mustang GT promises to keep getting better as you do.

YAMAHA THR10

7 It may not look much like a conventional guitar amp, but Yamaha's THR10 was a revelation when it first appeared back in 2011 and continues to be a hugely popular practice amp today. One of the first truly good-sounding desktop amps, the THR offers impressively rounded and punchy tones emulating classic amps of various types, while the battery-power option and ability to use it as a USB audio interface further cements it as a home-amp essential.

BLACKSTAR FLY 3

8 You may be forgiven for thinking the Blackstar Fly 3 couldn't possibly be a proper amp, given its tiny size, three watts of solid-state power and cheaper-than-an-effects-pedal price. You'd be wrong. The Fly's deceptively powerful three-inch full-range speaker delivers impressive clean tones, while the built-in delay sound is great. With a line-in for jamming along to songs and a headphone out that places your guitar sound at the centre of the stereo field, the Fly is the first micro-amp that genuinely sounds good and it's an office favourite. G

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HISTORY CLASS

Gibson Custom's 60th Anniversary 1959 Les Paul Standard is the rejuvenated company's latest attempt to replicate the most sought-after vintage guitar of all time. With more accessible pricing than other recent reissue models and the emphasis on attention to detail, is this Gibson's best Burst reissue to date?

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

ABOVE Gibson's alnico III Custombuckers are unpotted for a more authentic PAF-style sound

OPPOSITE TOP The metal parts are aged for a suitably vintage look

OPPOSITE MIDDLE The switch tip is period-correct Catalin, while the 'poker chip' surround is silkscreened cellulose acetate butyrate

OPPOSITE BOTTOM The butyrate top-hat knobs were originally recreated for 2015's True Historic range

Once the beating heart of youth rebellion, rock 'n' roll is now of pensionable age and the tools that powered its evolution are knocking on a bit, too. The Les Paul is a case in point, but Gibson has chosen the 60th anniversary of its most lusted-after incarnation to release what may be the company's best, most vintage-accurate Les Paul Standard since Eisenhower sat in the Oval Office.

Billed not just as a tribute, but a 'clone', this 2019 model incorporates some of the R&D that went into Gibson Custom's Collector's Choice and True Historic lines, saluting the instrument used to such blistering effect by the likes of Keith Richards, Eric Clapton, Michael Bloomfield and Jimmy Page. From period-correct hangtags to 3D-scanned top and neck carves and chemically recreated old-school plastics, the idea is to give Les Paul aficionados a guitar that ticks all the right boxes without costing as much as a house. Time to dig a little deeper…

WHY '59?

For most vintage-guitar collectors, sunburst Gibson Les Pauls from 1958-60 are the Holy Grails. Over the years, Gibson's various reissue models have encouraged guitar players to think of particular features as specific to certain model years, but the reality is that 1 January 1958 didn't see Gibson throw away its gold paint and immediately start applying cherry sunbursts. Of the 434 Les Paul Standards that left Parsons St, Kalamazoo in 1958, approximately half were Goldtops.

Production officially switched over to sunburst finishes and two-piece maple tops during July 1958, but the earliest factory 'Bursts', as they've become known, were serial numbers 8 3087 and 8 3096. According to Gibson's ledgers, these instruments shipped on 28 May 1958 and were logged as having a "special finish".

We encountered 8 3087 – generally regarded as the 'First Burst' – at Carter Vintage Guitars in Nashville in 2016 and it's a spellbinding instrument. Although its three-piece maple top isn't quite as aesthetically pleasing as the centre-joined, two-piece tops that followed, in every other respect, it appears that Gibson already had the formula nailed.

That said, some small but significant changes were phased in during 1959. For many, this crystallised the Les Paul Standards made during the period through to early 1960 as the high-water mark of electric solidbody manufacture. And we're not referring to the move to squarer corners on the jack socket plates. The key updates from a playability standpoint were

the arrival of wider fretwire and slightly slimmer neck dimensions, while the most desirable period also coincided with the serial-number range in which the red pigment in the guitars' sunburst finishes was most susceptible to fading when exposed to UV light.

Although the more colour-fast 'tomato soup' Bursts with thinner necks from later in 1960 are regarded as less appealing by some hardcore Les Paul fanatics, we're still talking about some of the best electric guitars ever made, with a monetary value way beyond the reach of 95 per cent of the population. Yet for the most part, it's the '59 – aided and abetted by the adoration of a laundry list of rock luminaries – that holds the most allure.

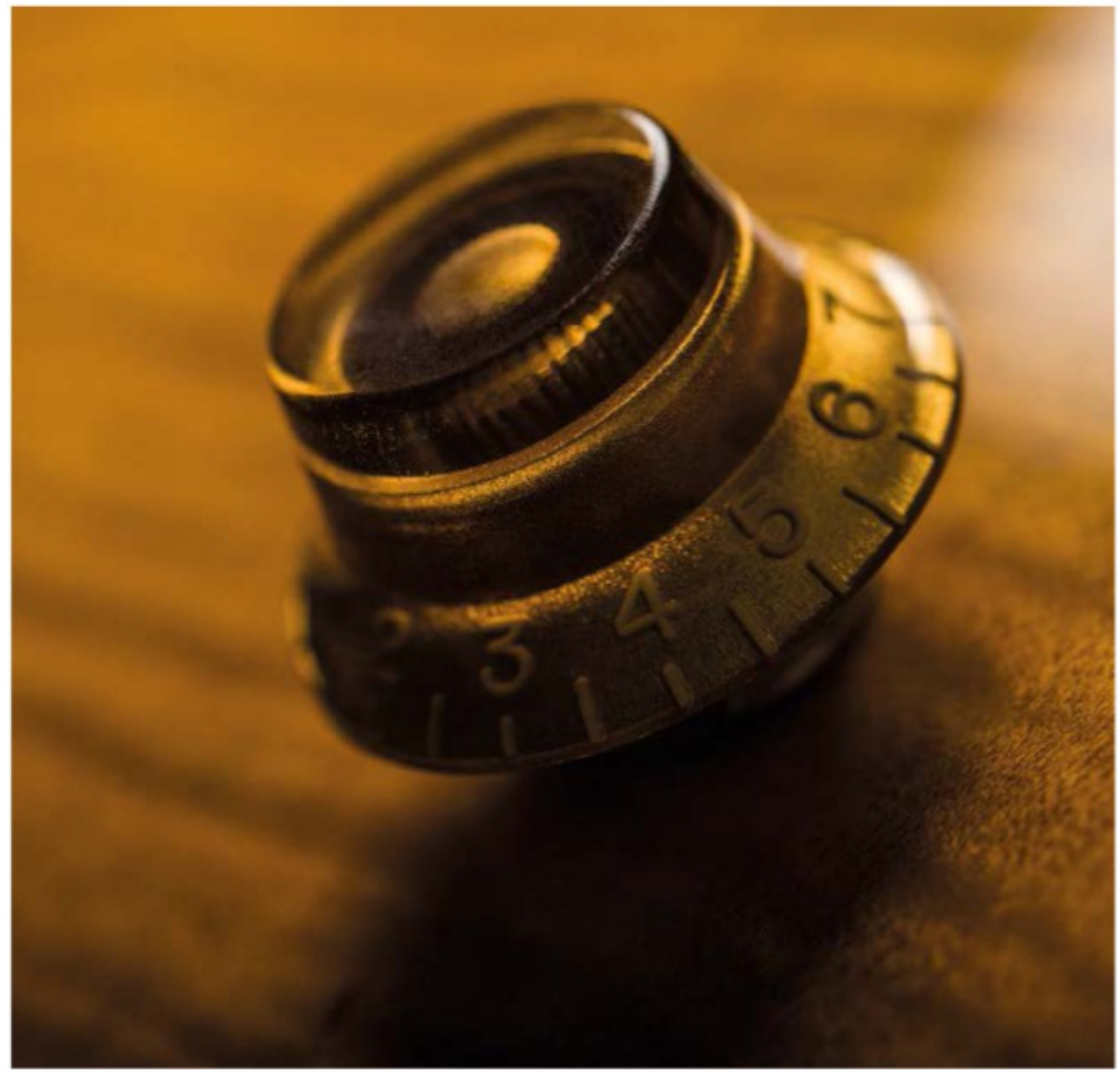
REWIND THE TAPE

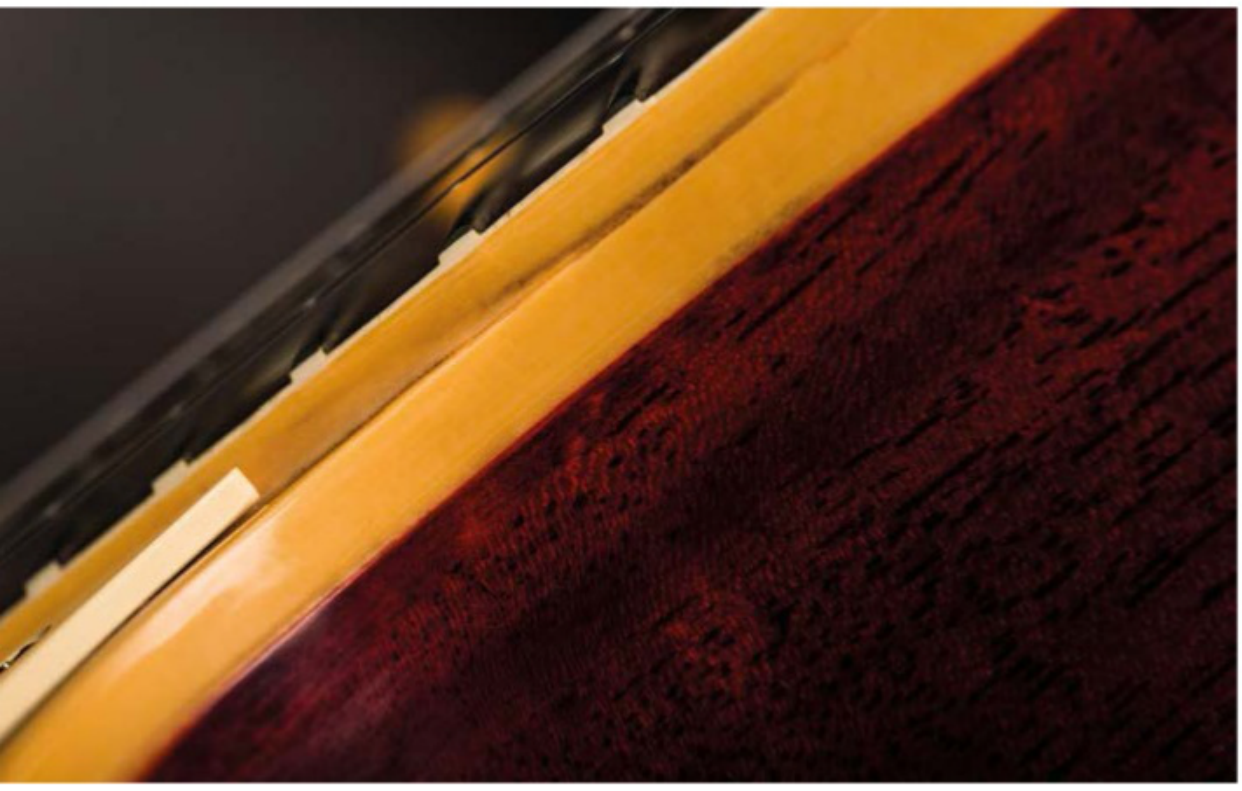
Celebrating six decades of the most famous guitar in its back catalogue, the newly reinvigorated Gibson unveiled the 60th Anniversary 1959 Les Paul Standard at Winter NAMM 2019. Despite the doom and gloom surrounding the company's finances, the Custom division has been doing some stellar work in recent years and our review guitar benefits directly from the research and development that went into True Historic and Collector's Choice. With True Historic now discontinued and the Collector's Choice concept having run its course, there's still scope to use the data, hardware and manufacturing techniques to inform new reissue models.

This manifests itself here in a top and neck carve taken from the Collector's Choice #37 'Carmelita' model, (created by 3D scanning the original Les Paul, serial number 9 1953) and the presence of plastics recreated for the True Historic programme unveiled in 2015, such as the amber Catalin switch tip and laminated cellulose acetate butyrate pickguard. For some, these are steps down the rabbit hole too far, but hardcore Les Paul aficionados inhabit a world in which imperfections such as chatter marks are desirable details on a reproduction scratchplate or truss-rod cover. Don't believe us? Check out the prices people are willing to pay for original vintage parts or high-quality aged repros on Reverb.

It's Gibson Custom category product specialist Mat Koehler's job to sweat the small stuff and he considers the use of hide glue for the top-to-back, fingerboard-to-neck and neck-to-body joins to be "a big part of the recipe" of the new 60th Anniversary guitar. "It was developed in 2014 for the True Historic models," says Mat. "It really does make the guitars more acoustically resonant and measurably louder, on top of being historically accurate.

"A louder and more resonant solidbody guitar produces better tone," Koehler insists. "People talk about the clarity of original PAF humbuckers and forget that a lot of that is the sound of the instruments themselves. The pickups capture the essence of the instrument as much as the design affects the tone shape."





ABOVE TOP The trapezoid fretboard inlays are aged cellulose nitrate

ABOVE BOTTOM Darker aniline dye on the back and sides of this 2019 model even out the contrast between the mahogany and the maple sliver in the cutaway

This ties in with the philosophy that an electric guitar should be thought of holistically, as a system in which the component parts working in harmony is the key to a great-sounding instrument. Rather than a straightforward process of replication, Mat reveals that finding the missing pieces of the puzzle involved "lots of time spent analysing 1950s Gibsons under the hood and lots of time spent A/B-ing various potentiometer brands and tapers and values against the original 1950s Centralabs. Hearing the differences in alnico II, III, IV and V magnets in our True Historic humbuckers and establishing consensus on a winner. Choosing to celebrate the sound of unpotted humbuckers and that squeak and squeal we're used to hearing out of vintage Les Pauls.

"It's weird science," he admits, "but we learned that attempting to replicate the 1950s processes and materials wouldn't always provide the result we were looking for. The composition and quality of those materials translates differently to what's available today. So we really had to use our ears, and we brought in artists and collectors and experts to make sure we weren't crazy [laughs]."

One such artist was Jason Isbell, himself a Burst owner after recently acquiring 'Red Eye', the 1959 Les Paul formerly owned by Lynyrd Skynyrd guitarist Ed King. "We just had Jason here with his '59 burst," reveals Mat. "He A/B'd it against a 60th Anniversary '59. He was absolutely flabbergasted. It was fun to see. The originals have this great transparency and 'bloom' and 'woof' and 'squeak' and all the other ridiculous words used to describe PAF tone. As soon as we removed the wax potting, I really feel we opened the door for all those elements of classic PAF tone to appear – especially when paired with the new wiring harness.

"Finally, some of the differences for 2019 were just aesthetic things fuelled by my obsessive-compulsive disorder," Mat admits. "We tweaked the headstock logos, the Les Paul silkscreen, inlay material, and colours of the bursts, dyes, metallics et cetera. Some of the parts have seen improved accuracy as well, and there is more minor work to be done to that extent, but we really tried to throw everything at these guitars that we possibly could!"

HANDS ON

The 60th Anniversary model's five-latch reissue Lifton case has reproduction hang-tags in its internal pocket along with a more modern Custom Shop COA (and better foam protection for the headstock). It might not be an original '59, but it's still a thrill to see an instrument such as this framed by the brown case's pink lining. Before we even pull the guitar out, simply walking around it reveals how much the mineral-streaked two-piece flametop ripples under lights. Just like many of the old ones, the maple cap looks almost plain from some angles and heavily figured from others.

The top looks the part and so does the headstock, with tinted clear coats over the mother of pearl Gibson logo lending it an authentic greenish-gold hue, while the position of the finer and lighter silkscreen signature and the stepped truss-rod cover with its slightly rough-textured white edging should appease internet-forum extremists. Back at the body end, in case you're wondering why the screw that holds the pickguard onto the bracket is a slot-head rather than a Phillips, the answer is that there was some randomness in this regard back in 1959, but plenty of Bursts left the factory with slot-heads. Panic over.

While the guitar's nitrocellulose finish has only a very subtle VOS treatment, its metal parts have a factory-aged patina and even a little rust here and there – the overall aesthetic vibe is one of a remarkably well preserved vintage instrument. Royal Teaburst is one of 10 finishes that are available, all emulating various stages of cherry-sunburst fade, aside from Kindred Burst, which is a tobacco sunburst. Around the back and sides, the aniline dye is a little darker than the shade used on other recent reissues and as a result, it's harder to see the sliver of maple in the cutaway.

This guitar's major departure from vintage specifications is, of course, the absence of a Brazilian

ABOVE For 2019, Gibson has revoiced the guitar's controls for a more authentic range of tones

rosewood fretboard. Gibson has only been able to source very limited quantities of high-quality Brazilian rosewood in recent years and none of it has shipped overseas since 2003. It isn't even a custom option for US customers and is only made available in limited runs.

However, there are two options for fretboard material when it comes to 2019's R9 – Indian and Bolivian rosewood. Thanks to CITES, many of us have been forced to become armchair experts on *Dalbergia latifolia*, but our review guitar's Bolivian 'board – with its smooth finish, dark-brown hue and far less noticeable pores than Indian or Brazilian rosewood – requires further investigation.

"Bolivian rosewood is essentially pau ferro from Bolivia that has been sorted and processed in Brazil and selected for its visual characteristics," reveals Mat. "It's dark and dense, unlike some pau ferro you see out there. The reason we offer it as an option is because it's export-friendly in the current CITES climate and it's a *great* fingerboard wood to use. It's actually a little closer density-wise to Brazilian rosewood than Indian rosewood."

So which does Mat prefer? "Honestly, I believe you can't go wrong. Indian and Bolivian are both great choices. No one has detected any tonal differences, as far as I know. I would expect maybe a little less compression and more clarity out of the Bolivian because of the density. But we're talking about splitting hairs here."

At the fretboard edges, the binding is thin and the fret nibs are suitably understated, while the side dots are tortoiseshell, as they were in the 1950s. Even with a 3D scanner recording hundreds of points all over the neck of a vintage guitar and that data being used to program a CNC machine, the amount of hand-sanding that takes place after the automated carve means that there will always be slight variances.

The 'Carmelita' neck profile here feels just about perfect, with its appealingly soft shoulders and a 22.3mm first-fret depth filling out to 25.1mm at the octave.

IN USE

What are we looking for from a great Les Paul? Although there's a hell of a range when it comes to musical reference points, our dozen or so meaningful encounters with real Bursts have revealed more similarities than differences. One thing that's common is treble, and lots of it, with extended upper harmonics and enough high-end presence to play faux-pedal-steel country licks.

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

Think about the stinging attack of Bloomfield and Beano and how those huge, biting lead tones are reminiscent of a Telecaster on steroids – there's something horn-like in the adenoidal, almost vocal quality of single notes. It's easy to hear how the PAF fits into the Gibson pickup family tree as a logical step forward from the P-90, with which it has so much shared sonic DNA.

Without being shackled by heavy potting, the alnico III Custombuckers in our review guitar have plenty of air in the high end and there's an abundance of light and shade on tap thanks to volume and tone controls that have no shortage of usable, musical range. Interestingly, the concave tops on the butyrate knobs mean that it's a little easier to get some purchase on those top hats in sweaty stage conditions than it is when using less accurate repros.

The shifting harmonics you can hear when you hold a chord and listen closely to this guitar's acoustic sustain are present in abundance when plugged in. The amplified tones range from cutting to dark and complex, yet the neck pickup is never woolly or cloying; there's always plenty of snap available if you dig in with fingers or a pick, while the bridge is the place to go for more of a nasal quack. It's powerful, too, with plenty of punch for rock riffs and powerchords.

When we rev up a Collector's Choice Les Paul loaded with original PAFs for comparison, it's clear that Gibson has indeed been listening hard. The PAF-equipped reference LP has more separation when playing complex chords and a slightly sweeter treble extension, but the strong family resemblance between the two sets of tones on offer is undeniable. Not bad when you consider that the PAFs alone are worth about as much as our review guitar.

Through a tweed Fender or Plexi-style Marshall, the 60th Anniversary model does everything a good Les Paul should, and even when pushing the amp hard with a Tube Screamer and a klone, we don't experience unwanted microphonic feedback – especially not at the kind of stage volumes at which most of us are gigging these days.

There will always be those who want to make further tweaks to a reissue guitar in the spirit of recreating every detail of a vintage instrument – even its flaws – but we'd strongly recommend getting to know what the Custombuckers can do in their latest unpotted incarnation before you consider swapping them out.

And even if you do want to use this 60th Anniversary model as a platform for modifications, it's more affordable and vintage-correct than many recent True Historic and Collector's Choice models. Regardless, in its stock form, this is a dream guitar for most players and Gibson Custom has done a fine job of recreating a mid-century classic for the modern world.

ABOVE Tinted clear coats over the mother of pearl Gibson logo lend it a greenish-gold hue

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £5,199 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody set-neck electric guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Two-piece figured maple top with single-ply Royalite binding, solid mahogany back, solid mahogany neck with 'Authentic '59 Medium C-Shape' profile, bound Bolivian rosewood/pau ferro fingerboard with 12-inch radius, 22 medium-jumbo frets, nylon nut, aged cellulose nitrate trapezoid inlays, holly headstock veneer
HARDWARE & PLASTICS Nickel no-wire ABR-1 bridge with lightweight aluminium stop-bar tailpiece. Kluson single-line, single-ring tuners, laminated cellulose acetate butyrate pickguard and jack plate, stepped two-ply truss-rod cover, butyrate gold top-hat knobs, amber Catalin switch tip, silkscreened cellulose acetate butyrate poker chip
ELECTRICS 2x alnico III unpotted Custombuckers, CTS 500K Audio Taper potentiometers (2x volume, 2x tone) with paper-in-oil capacitors, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628.6mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.3mm at first fret, 25.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.8mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 8.9lb/4.03kg
FINISH Royal Teaburst nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Cherry Teaburst, Factory Burst, Green Lemon Fade, Southern Fade, Slow Iced Tea Fade, Sunrise Teaburst, Golden Poppy Burst, Kindred Burst, Orange Sunset Fade
OPTIONS Indian rosewood fingerboard
LEFT-HANDERS Yes
CONTACT Gibson gibson.com

9/10 **A gorgeous Les Paul that's closer to the golden-era experience than most**

RORY
GAL

FRESH EVIDENCE

As we approach a quarter of a century since the tragic passing of Rory Gallagher, a brand-new album of rare and unheard material aims to shed fresh light on the legendary Irish guitarist's love of the blues. The man responsible for combing through Rory's vast archive of recordings is his nephew, Daniel Gallagher. We spent a few illuminating hours in the company of Daniel and a selection of classics and rarities from his uncle's collection to learn about compiling a labour of love, how Rory was ahead of his time in the guitar collecting stakes and why he was more than just a magician on the guitar…

WORDS JOSH GARDNER **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

© John Minihan c/o The Rory Gallagher Estate

ABOVE Rory playing his 1966 Telecaster on *Gambling Blues* at the Isle Of Wight Festival in August 1970

OPPOSITE The 1966 Telecaster was temporarily refinished in Irish green after being run over by an airport luggage cart

"For me, it's just the talking between takes. Those are special little moments, as his nephew and also loving his music… hearing him… it's a weird thing." Daniel Gallagher has spent much of his adult life working with Rory Gallagher's huge archive of gear and recordings. When we ask him to pick out a highlight of the meticulous process of creating the brand-new collection of rare and unheard material entitled *Blues*, it's clear that it was a personal journey as much as a musical one. "I don't think anyone but the hardcore would want them on the album," he chuckles, "but you get all these jokes, false starts… the drummer drops a stick and it starts a big argument… they're really special."

We're sat in the rather lovely surroundings of New Kings Road Vintage Guitar Emporium – the legendary London guitar shop a stone's throw from the house where Rory lived before his tragic death in 1995 and where Daniel grew up. Understandably, the location alone brings back plenty of memories of his uncle.

"Obviously, we weren't out boozing together!" Daniel jokes. "But he'd come over a lot for Sunday lunch, because he lived up the road from us. I remember 1987 was the first time I saw him play live, at the Hammersmith Odeon. My dad took me and my older brother. He didn't tell us where we were going and next thing we knew, we were at the side of the stage, and my uncle saw us and just started duck-walking across to us!

"It was crazy, because even though he would tell me he was a musician… I thought he said he was a *magician* – because he'd always do magic tricks for me! So I'd never really thought too much about it as a five-year-old! But I was just totally blown away by what he was doing… and then to look out and see this audience going crazy. I didn't realise he and my dad were that cool!"

CALLING CARD

The process of putting together the full three-disc deluxe package has been a long one, facilitated by a deal signed with Universal Records and Chess that finally enabled Daniel to do something with the huge archive of recordings that Rory left behind when he passed away.

"They moved all of the tape archive over to New York to their storage and digitising team – there were over a thousand different masters and multi-tracks,"

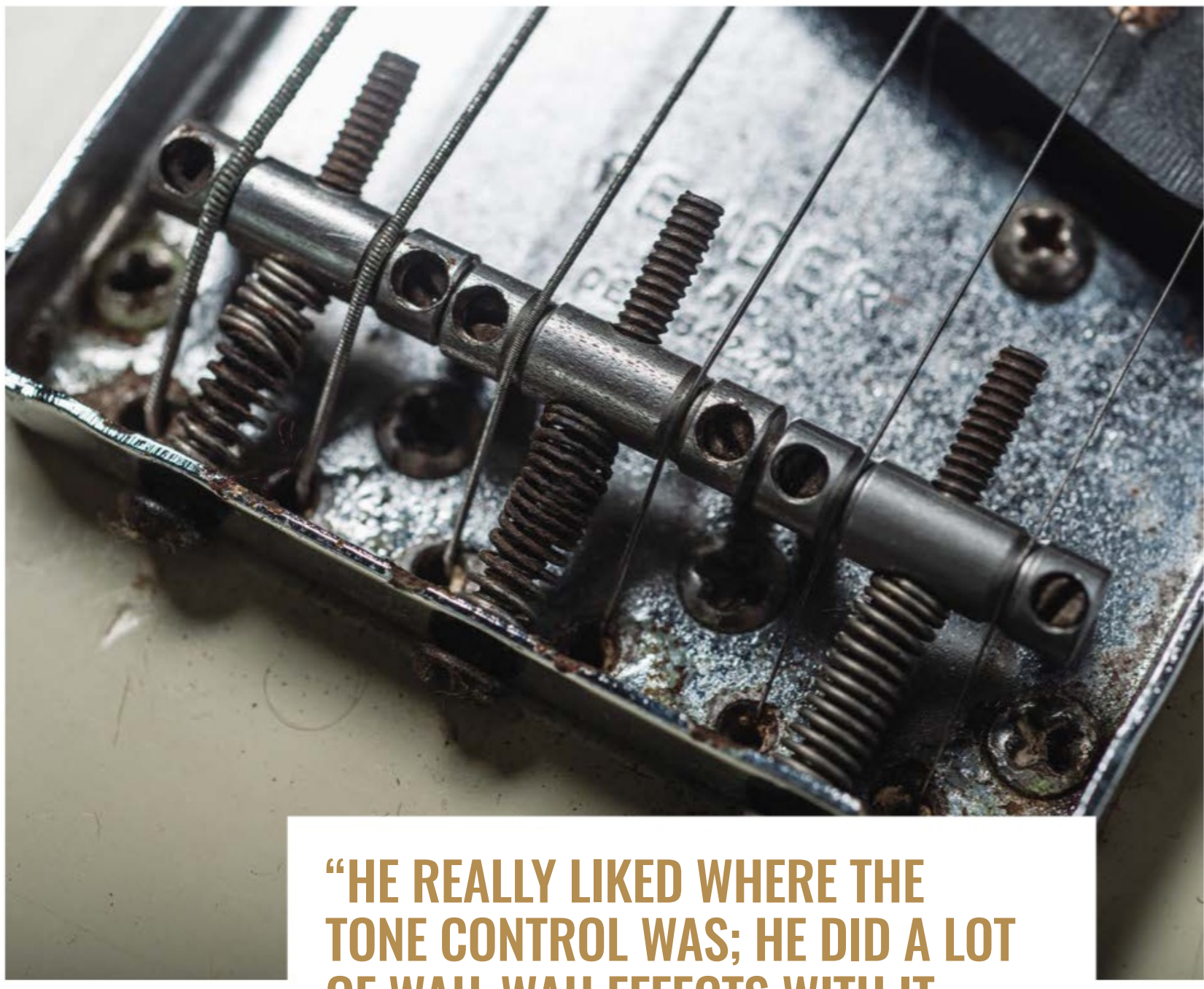
Fender Twin-Amp

Daniel exclaims. "As we were moving them all over, I noted when I thought, 'Oh that looks a bit odd…' – things that had stuff written on that I hadn't heard of before. And we were able to say: 'Well, let's digitise that and see what's on it!'

"We found stuff that we never knew existed. There was a tape just marked, 'Rory with Van Morrison'. And I was like, 'If we've got a fucking track and he's convinced Van to do the vocals…' So straight away, I got them to digitise it, but it turns out that Van was just sat in the control room having a cigarette and a drink listening to the band record, but apparently the engineer wanted to mark the occasion!"

This deep dive wasn't all wild-goose chases, however – sometimes the archive's eccentric labelling turned up some gems.

"There's a full electric version of *As The Crow Flies* with the full band that would have been recorded at Polydor Studios in 1973, the same session as *Tattoo*… but it was written 'Crawford Files', or that's how it looked on the tape! So I was like, 'Is this some old TV show that he's recorded?!' But we digitised it, and found these two takes of him doing *As The Crow Flies*, which he later decided to go on and do solo with the National resonator.



"There's some really cool stuff, but there's still a tonne of other stuff – there's only so many tapes I can convince them to let me digitise at once! So there's a lot more to keep searching through."

TOP PRIORITY

New Kings Road Vintage Guitar Emporium is a very distracting place for any guitarist to hang out. It's hard to move without quite literally tripping over one of the gorgeous old guitars racked four or five deep on the shop floor, while the walls are littered with photos of megastars from Noel Gallagher to Jimmy Page and beyond, who've bought or sold instruments through its storied proprietor, Rick Zsigmond.

It's safe to say that it takes a lot to impress a man such as Rick, who has seen it all over the years, but he's definitely excited about what Daniel's brought with him today – a selection of gigbags, hard cases and flightcases containing some of the treasures from Rory's huge collection.

"Forget the Strat, this is my favourite Rory guitar!" he exclaims, as a white 1966 Telecaster comes out of an unassuming case. From a man who's been up close and personal with Clapton's Blackie, Gary Moore's Burst and Gilmour's #0001 Strat that's some endorsement, so what better place to start our tour through some of Rory's remarkable guitar collection?

1966 FENDER TELECASTER

Rory's most iconic guitar might be his battered '61 Strat (see p40), but Daniel thinks his heart actually belonged to Leo's firstborn creation. "They were probably his favourite guitar," he insists. "Obviously, his Strat was his favourite guitar, but as a model, I think he really, really liked the Tele. He tinkered with them a lot to make them do other things… but he loved them.

"He really liked where the tone control was; he did a lot of wah-wah effects with it. On his Strat, he ended up just doing that with the bottom tone control, and he actually glued the middle one so it didn't work! Ultimately, he just loved that Telecaster sound – when you hear him talk about guitars in interviews, I think they were his favourites."

"HE REALLY LIKED WHERE THE TONE CONTROL WAS; HE DID A LOT OF WAH-WAH EFFECTS WITH IT. ULTIMATELY, HE JUST LOVED THAT TELECASTER SOUND"

OPPOSITE TOP The 1966 Tele was heavily modded by Rory, and has routing for a middle pickup

OPPOSITE LEFT Like most Fenders of its vintage, the Tele's golden decal has oxidised to a greenish colour – and we stand accused of loving the verdigris

ABOVE Rory's first modification to the 1966 Tele was to replace the original threaded steel saddles with grooved units

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1961 FENDER STRATOCASTER

The story of how Rory's legendary Strat got its uniquely worn finish…

Rory's battered and bruised early 60s Stratocaster has become one of the most iconic instruments in rock 'n' roll history. It would be remiss under those circumstances to not ask Rory's nephew to tell the story of the guitar and how it feels to strap it on…

"It's almost like a piece of driftwood and Rory was the ocean on it – it's so worn to him! Obviously, there's the paint going and the divots where his pick and hands were wearing into it, but for me, it's the back… it's just the smoothest bit of wood, really beautiful to touch, and that's just from rubbing against him.

"The blue from his jeans is actually dyed into the wood! And the neck… it's just the sweetest thing – it's so perfectly worn, your hand just slides up it – it's quite light, and it's so playable! When you pick up another Strat it's like, 'Oh okay, this is nice and everything…', but this just fits into you. I'm maybe a touch taller and bigger than he is, but for someone of his size and height, you can see how it would just fit absolutely perfectly. And he never took it off after he got it in 1963."

Rumour has it that Rory's Strat was the first ordered in to Ireland, but the story of how he came across it is typically unique…

"The leader of another showband ordered it in, but he wanted it in Fiesta Red," Daniel explains. "So here it is, the first Strat in Ireland… but when it turned up it was Sunburst! He did a tour with it – there's actually some cool footage of the guy playing it, and someone sent me a photo the other day of the guy playing it in Carnegie Hall.

"So he had it for about six months, and then the Fiesta Red turned up, so he put it into a shop called Crowley's in Cork, just down the road from my great-grandmother's pub that Rory lived above with his mother and my dad, and he got it on hire-purchase. He had a beat-up old Italian Rosetti that was his first guitar and so he traded that in, got the guitar, and was doing the showband stuff with it, and yeah, he just saved up all his wages and paid it off in instalments."

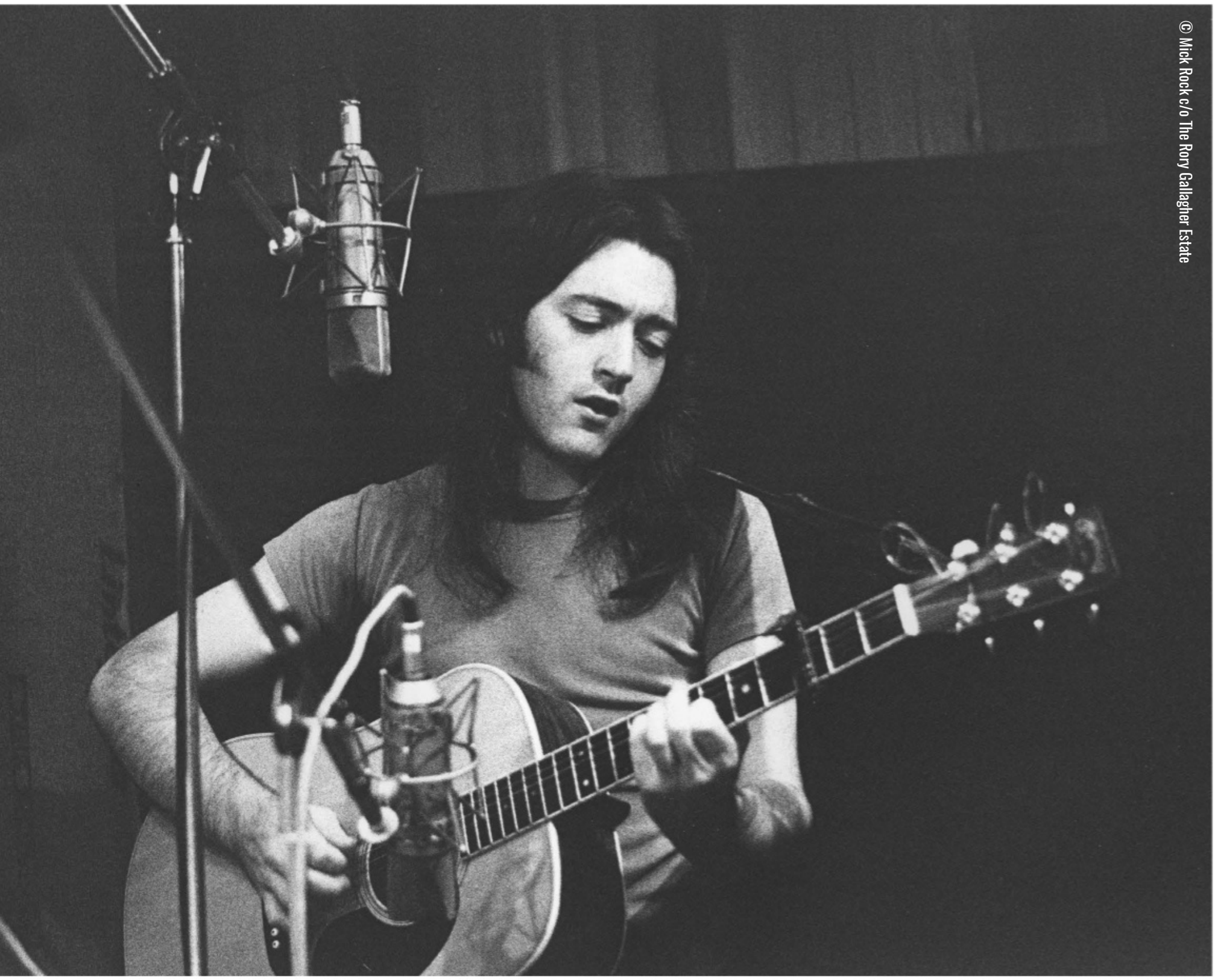
Even for a guitar that was used as heavily as it was, however, Rory's Strat is famously, remarkably worn and beaten up – and while received wisdom often lays the blame at Rory's propensity to sweat on stage, the reality is actually more interesting…

"The start of the wear would have been around 1965 or '66, when the guitar got stolen," says Daniel. "They actually did a little piece on Ireland's version of *Crimewatch*! It was very condescending, it was this thing on RTÉ called 'Irish Police Watch' or something like that [It was actually *RTÉ Garda Patrol* – Ed] and it was like, 'Oh and a young man with long hair has had two of his guitars stolen…' – I think it was the Tele and the Strat – 'If anyone sees them, they look like this…' and a picture went up on the screen. I really want to find that footage from RTÉ's archive!

"But they got dumped in a ditch about two weeks later, because the guy couldn't sell them – obviously! They'd been on telly, and it was probably the only Strat in Ireland, there probably weren't that many Teles, either – so they were going to be hard to shift!

"So because they were too hot, he dumped them in this ditch, where someone found them and two weeks later, Rory had them back. But I think it got a bit of water damage from that, and probably a lot of scratches from brambles and all that, plus Rory's constant playing of it just wore it away!"

THIS SPREAD Gallagher's beloved 1961 Stratocaster, photographed in front of his extensive record collection. Donal and Daniel Gallagher's archive still contains many of Rory's possessions, including music memorabilia, stickered suitcases and more



© Mick Rock c/o The Rory Gallagher Estate

ABOVE Rory's favourite acoustic, the 1968 Martin D-35 above, features heavily on the new *Blues* album

Rory got this white Telecaster in the mid 60s and continued to use it throughout his career with Taste and as a solo artist. Perhaps most famously and impactfully, he used the Tele on stage at the 1970 Isle Of Wight Festival – a performance that was immortalised on a live album that would become the trio's swansong.

"My favourite bit of footage of him is when he's playing *Gambling Blues* at the Isle Of Wight," Daniel enthuses. "Early on, he liked a sharp attack with his slide playing, so he used a brass slide with it so it was really stinging and direct with the AC30 – when you're trying to get through to 600,000 people it helps if you have a bit of bite.

"He *loved* that guitar for slide, for so much of his slide work, he'd use the Tele. If you watch *Irish Tour*, he swaps back and forth between the Esquire and the Tele. I think he'd have, say, one in D, and that one in A, then as he needed, he'd just jump on it."

As is a common theme with Rory's guitars, the Tele has seen its fair share of modifications over the years. "If we took the scratchplate off that, there'd be the routing for a middle pickup," Daniel explains. "He went mad at one point and I think he got a Seymour Duncan pickup and put it in there! I guess he just wanted to see if it sounded like a Strat? But he didn't add a five-way switch, so he'd have had to wedge it in-between, like they did with old Strats."

Despite its rough life, it's amazing that this still remains a wonderful, inspiring instrument, with a beautifully played-in neck and a weight right in the Telecaster sweet spot zone at 3.3kg/7.3lb. Okay, so it probably needs a new set of strings – given that they're corroded to the point of near-disintegration – but with good cause, as the last person to change the strings was Rory himself.

"It's a bit of a moral quandary," Daniel admits. "It does feel like we should leave it as Rory left it. The strings will eventually rust and break of course, but most of these guitars still have the original strings that he put on them."

1968 MARTIN D-35

Rory's acoustic playing is oft-forgotten, but he was a fine flat-top player – and for most of his recording career, this battered and bruised D-35 was his favoured instrument.

"This is the one. It's his acoustic for everything," Daniel confirms. "From Taste onwards, it was all done with this. It features heavily on the new *Blues* album,

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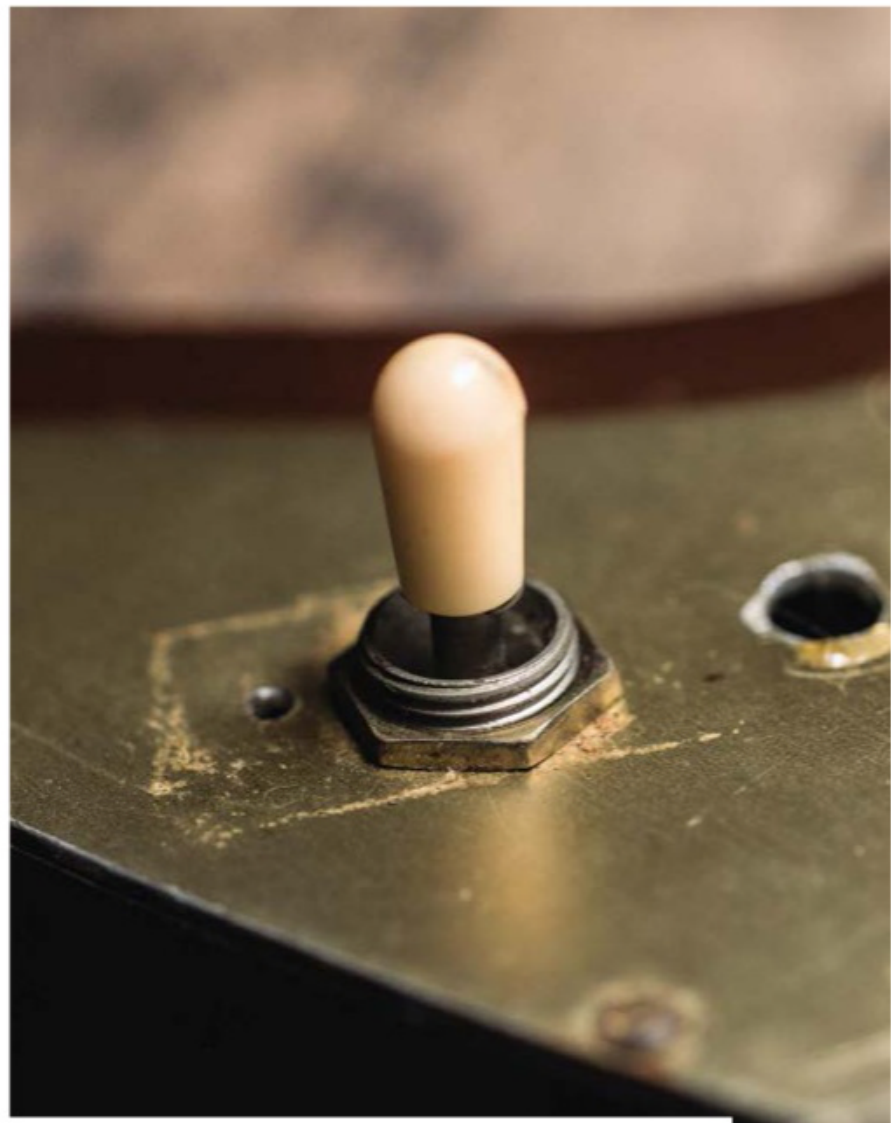
as there's one disc that's all-acoustic in the three-CD package. He loved playing blues on acoustic, that's why I wanted to make a whole disc of it.

"He's so associated with that screaming Strat sound, but I think his acoustic playing is so excellent and it might be my favourite part of the album. He's playing either this or the National (1932 Triolian Resonator) and the National was more for slide.

"But it's on tracks like *Blow Wind Blow* and a track called *Prison Blues* – which we'd never even heard before! We found it on a tape that was marked for the *Blueprint* album and it was just him and Lou Martin on piano, and him on the Martin. It's a finished song! They recorded it, it sounds fantastic, but for whatever reason, it didn't make the album and no one ever saw it again! But this was by far his favourite acoustic and he just loved playing it."

1957 RICKENBACKER COMBO 400

Moving away from his more legendary instruments, it becomes clear that Rory had an eye for the unconventional and the unusual, long before weird pawn-shop guitars were dragged into the mainstream by the likes of Jack White and Dan Auerbach. One such oddity is a late-50s Rickenbacker Combo 400



"HE HAD OVER 120 GUITARS! THERE'S THE ONES YOU KNOW FROM THE STAGE, ALBUM COVERS, TV... BUT THEN THERE'S THE ONES THAT HE JUST HAD AT HIS HOUSE"

– with its gold anodised scratchplate and a back covered in a grey non-slip material made of a mix of horse hair and enamel paint designed to stop the guitar moving around, it's certainly a curious guitar and perfectly at home in Rory's collection.

"He had over 120 guitars!" Daniel exclaims. "There's the ones that you know from the stage, album covers, TV shows and all that… but then there's the ones that he just had at his house.

"When I was a kid, he lived on the Fulham Road, not far from here and I would pop in on the way back from school, and if he'd answer the door, I'd go in and try to get a guitar lesson out of him! But there was always guitars *everywhere* – just in case he had an idea. In the kitchen, in the living room, there was always a guitar at hand.

"I haven't see another one, but I think someone has ripped the pickup and added a single-coil extra bit to the pickguard to accommodate it, and they've actually matched it quite well – it definitely didn't come out of the factory looking like that!

"In our archive there are just boxes and boxes of old pickups that he would constantly be swapping in and out. He had a bunch of guys – including Chris Eccleshall and Dave Edwards – and he'd go: 'I've picked this up, can you try it in this… see if you can make it sound like the Strat.'

"I think he was always hunting for another guitar that did exactly what he wanted, like the Strat did – that was a big part of it."

1963 EPIPHONE CORONET

One of the most strikingly desirable guitars Daniel has brought with him today is an Epiphone Coronet from 1963 – with its single P-90 pickup and beautifully checked and faded finish, it might be the most eye-catching guitar here, and Daniel agrees…

"I absolutely love this guitar!" he enthuses. "The upper-fret access, the colour, everything! He absolutely loved P-90s. I think if he could have routed out his Strat and put a P-90 in the bridge he probably would have! He loved Les Paul Juniors, the Gretsch Corvette he had, he routed it out and put a P-90 in there.

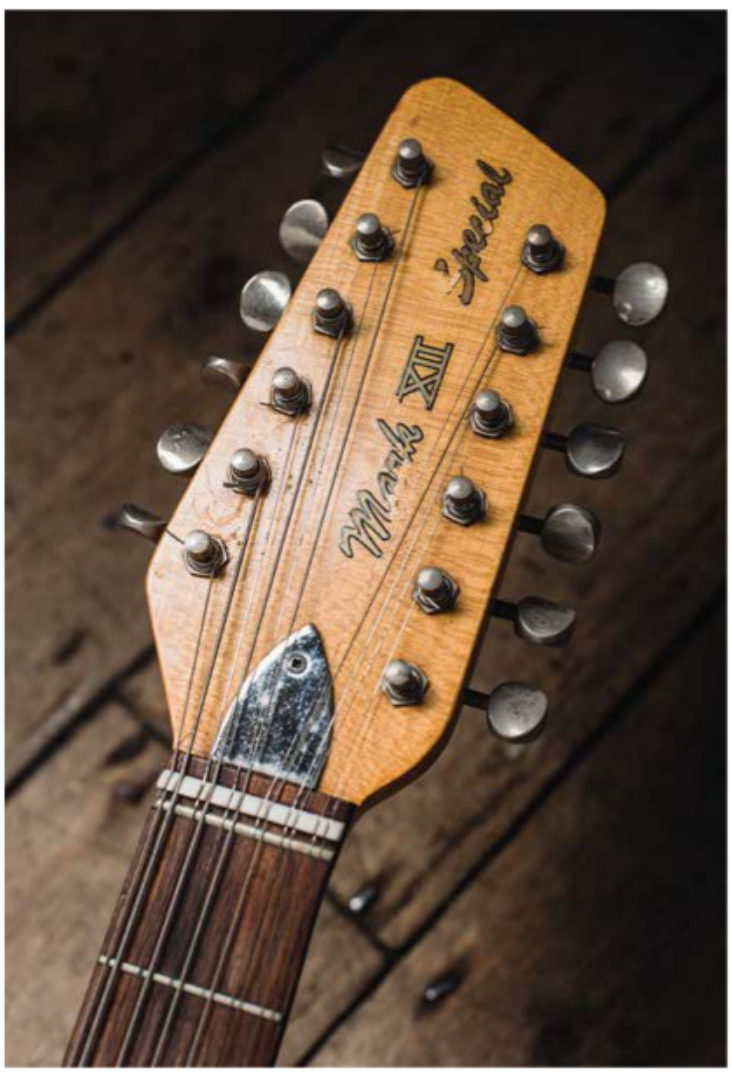
OPPOSITE TOP This 1957 Rickenbacker Combo 400 is much altered and is about as out-there as any instrument in Rory's 120-strong collection

ABOVE LEFT The tune-o-matic bridge was likely retrofitted to offer more stability than the original Rickenbacker unit

ABOVE RIGHT The guitar's scratchplate bears the scars from a series of electronic mods

OPPOSITE LEFT Rory's D-35 was recreated by Martin in a limited run of 29

THIS PAGE The ’63 Epiphone Coronet’s warped scratchplate is also broken in the corner, revealing the original hue of the finish



"He liked P-90s for slide, so you can see this being a slide guitar. With a lot of songs, such as *Bullfrog Blues*, he liked to have one setup, as opposed to having loads of controls and pickups to mess with. It was like, 'that's the tone for that song'. So having just the one pickup, he liked that there was no messing, really direct, loads of attack – and having loads of access at the upper frets would also be great for slide.

"I think he just got this because it was green, for Ireland! The checking on it is amazing, and the scratchplate is bowing, but it looks so cool – I'd steal that!"

1967 VOX MARK XII SPECIAL

Without doubt the weightiest guitar on hand today is a late-60s Vox 12-string that perhaps doesn't fit in with Rory's general vibe, but was likely bought in tribute to one of his guitar inspirations.

"He would have definitely got this because he was a massive Brian Jones fan," Daniel explains. "Brian Jones was the first person he ever saw playing slide guitar and that had a big, big impact on him. He'd heard it on Muddy Waters records, but I don't think he'd actually seen anyone play it. He was over in London with the showband, and he went to the

THIS PAGE By the late 60s, Vox was experimenting with a range of intriguing onboard effects which mirrored the spirit of the era

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Rory's guitars are wonderful in their own right, but his amplifiers have a few stories to tell, too…

Rory Gallagher's use of the Vox AC30 with a Dallas Rangemaster Treble Booster was iconic and influential – combined with his Strat and Tele, this was the bedrock of so much of his music. "That's the tone!" Daniel says of the battered Top Boost model, as we remove it from its flightcase. "It started out because that's the amp that was available to him when he played with the showband. Being an English company, you could actually get hold of them in Ireland at the time, whereas a Fender amp would have been very hard to get.

"As soon as he plugged in the Dallas Rangemaster Treble Booster, that was his sound for Taste and the first few solo albums. It's piercing, but for that three-piece thing, he was aware that sonically, the bass and drums take care of all the low end and so having that sharper tone meant that he would be able to stand out with the guitar, rather than having something muddier like the 'woman' tone. I think the Vox and the Treble Booster made the sound jump out.

"He liked Vox amps because he could turn them all the way up and still get a good tone out of it. He enjoyed playing smaller venues – it was one of his quirks. He'd rather play five nights in a small place than one night in a big place, because it meant that he could have that full-bore and not need to get anything else, like a Marshall stack."

So committed was Rory to his beloved combo, that even when he played the Isle Of Wight festival with Taste in 1970, it was still his only backline… "The whole time you can just see that amp, sat on two folding chairs, with a curly cable sticking out of it and that's it," Daniel laughs. "And then it was just him, a guitar and a brass slide… how can you stand in front of 600,000 people, with this little amp cranked up and a mic in front of it and be totally fine? When you look at the backline that everyone else had – people like The Who with their stacks and stuff – and all he needed was his AC30."

As Rory's band expanded, he started to bring Fenders into the mix, namely this '56 Twin. "He would always keep a Vox going live, but with the introduction of the keyboards – Lou Martin who joined in '73 – he started using Fender amps in conjunction with the Vox. I guess it was a balancing thing: going to a four-piece and having to find where the guitar fit in better with the keyboards."

But it's Rory's use of the AC30 that was so hugely influential – not least with one other very famous Vox user… "There's this cool story about Brian May coming to watch him a lot at the Marquee club," Daniel explains. "Brian says he snuck backstage once everyone had been kicked out after a gig and asked him how he got his sound and Rory talked him through the Treble Booster and the AC30. And Brian just went straight out and bought it, and got his sound from there…"

THIS SPREAD Although the AC30 is virtually synonymous with Rory's signature sound, he also added tweed amps to his rig once the band lineup expanded to include a keyboard player

THIS SPREAD Despite the retrofuturistic appearance of this 1965 Res-O-Glas-bodied instrument, Rory saw it as an authentic blues guitar

Marquee, saw the Stones and saw Brian Jones play slide, thought, 'Okay that's pretty cool!' and went and got a slide. I would imagine that at some time he saw this guitar in a shop and thought, 'Oh, Brian Jones!' and that was it.

"I have a photo of him playing it live, from the late 70s, but I can't imagine what he'd have been actually playing with it, because he did have touches of 12-string on his recordings to embellish the sound, but the only time you really remember him playing something with extra strings was the Coral Sitar. He's not playing blues on a 12-string!"

1965 NATIONAL AIRLINE

A couple of decades before Jack White made the Res-O-Glas-bodied catalogue guitar iconic, Rory Gallagher was again ahead of the curve, picking up this red and white beauty and using it onstage in the 1980s.

"He played it a bit in the mid 80s," Daniel confirms. "There's some nice footage of him playing it on *What In The World* at Montreux in '85. Again, he liked it for slide, but it didn't want to stay in tune a lot! I think it's something about having that neck on that plastic body isn't the best for stability!

"He thought guitars like this were cool, that nobody else was paying attention to, but to him they're blues guitars! JB Hutto played an Airline, and Rory covered *Too Much Alcohol*, so he'd have had his albums and saw that thing and gone, 'What is this mad thing?! I want that guitar because it's on the front of his album.'

"Another thing would be on the road – certainly in America – he had a couple of incidents early on. Obviously, his Strat and Tele got stolen in 1965, the Tele got run over by an airport trolley and he watched it happen… so he wouldn't go and pick an expensive guitar, because he knew with his luck, it would get smashed on the way back!

"So by getting these ones that were $50 here and $75 there, he wouldn't feel too bad if they fell off a luggage cart or something!"

1968 MOSRITE JOE MAPHIS DOUBLE NECK

Perhaps the most leftfield guitar in from our selection is this double-neck Mosrite – "Double Ramones!" as Rick exclaims when the guitar comes out of its case. And at first glance, it doesn't seem to be the most 'Rory' of guitars… "He liked Joe Maphis, but this is definitely out of the 'looks cool' section as opposed

"WHEN HE WAS ON THE ROAD, ESPECIALLY IN AMERICA, HE WOULD JUST GO INTO PAWN SHOPS AND BUY LOADS OF KAYS, HARMONYS, TOKAIS AND TEISCOS"

THIS SPREAD Another contender for the weirdest guitar in Rory's collection, this Mosrite double-neck was probably bought for its looks

to anything that was particularly useful!" Daniel chuckles. "He'd no doubt have gone, 'That looks mad… *four* pickups – okay, just break off the tremolo arm and we'll be sorted!

"I've seen him talk about having this, although I haven't found any references to him actually playing it for anything, so I think it's definitely 'one for the collection'!

"I could never imagine Rory being a double-neck player live! For someone like Jimmy Page, it's obviously cool as hell, but for Rory it's just a bit too pompous. So I think part of it must have been Rory thinking, 'Yeah, okay, they do look cool… but I can't get a fancy Gibson one! I've gotta get the Mosrite!'"

1965 TEISCO DEL REY

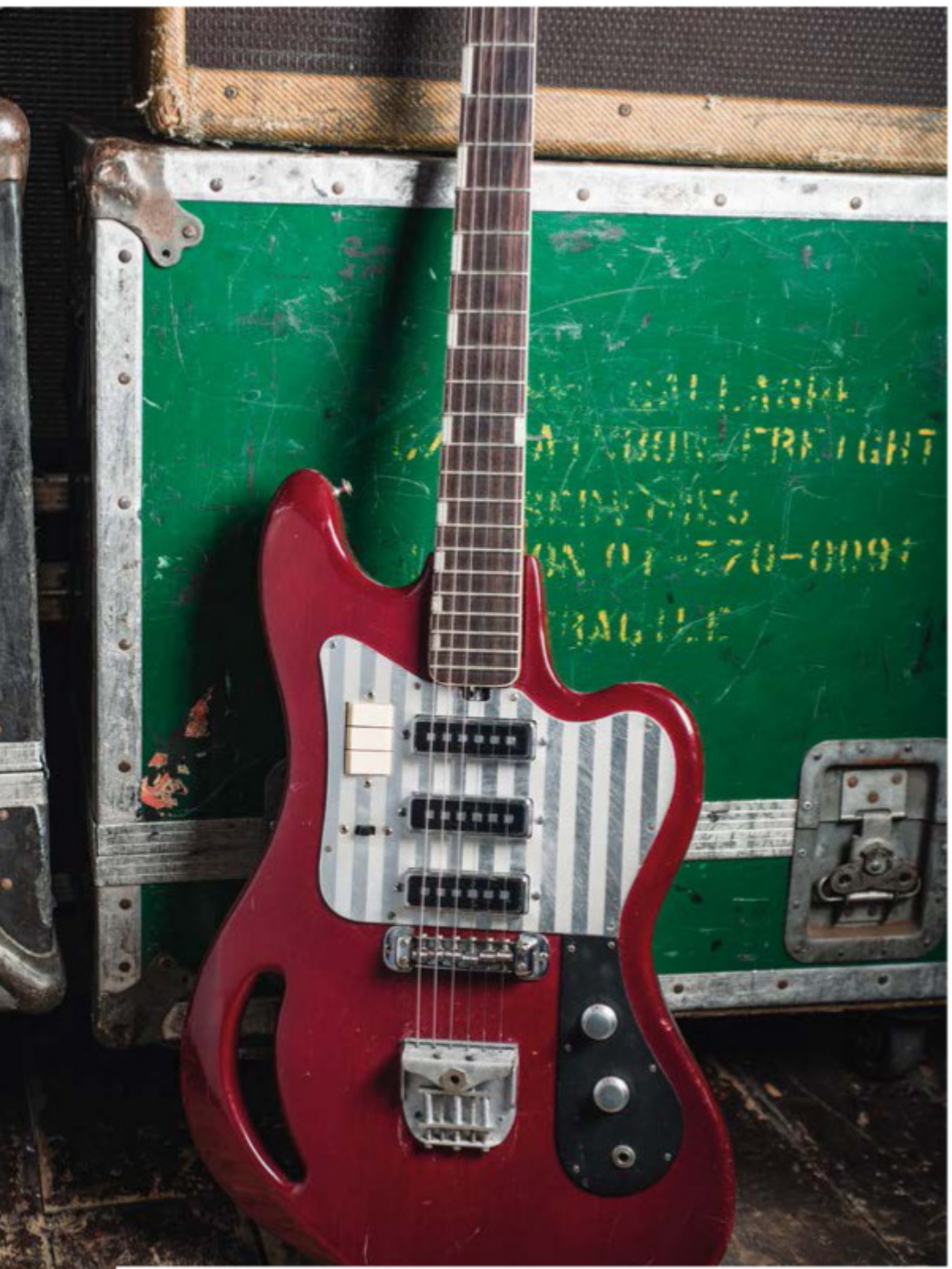
Our final leftfield electric comes from Teisco. The Japanese budget brand might have been recently reborn as a maker of oddball effects, but during the mid 1960s, it was bringing its eccentric design approach to guitars such as this offset. "This is such a mad thing! It's so cool – it's got a handle, nobody needs a handle!" Daniel laughs.

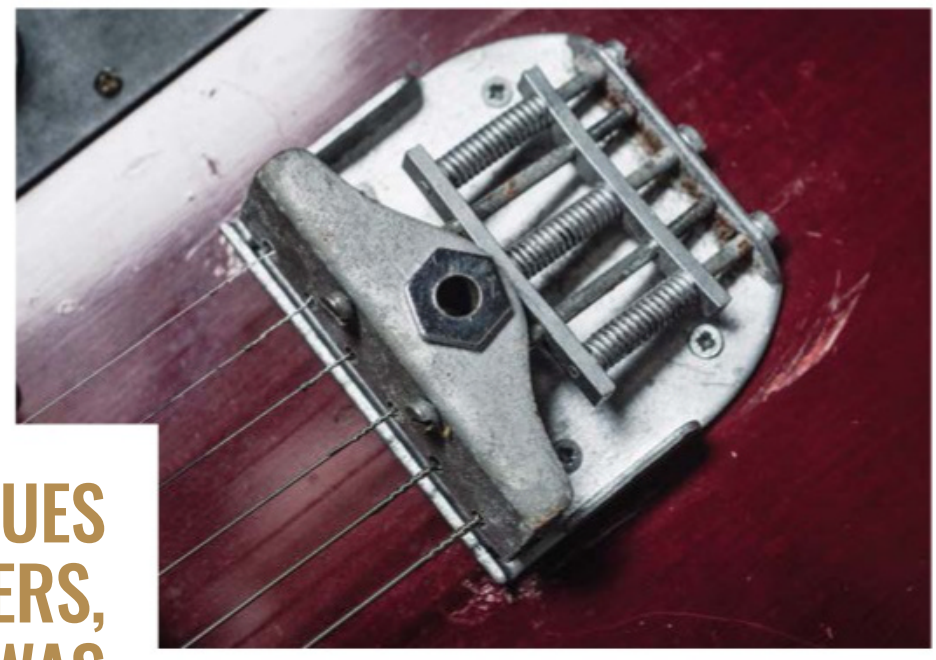
"I feel like this is another one of those guitars where he saw it and thought, 'That's mad, nobody else is playing one, I'll take it!' And it probably only cost him a couple of hundred dollars, if that!

"When he was on the road, especially in America, he would just go into pawn shops and buy loads of Kays, Harmonys, Tokais and Teiscos. He wouldn't be interested in buying that year's new Strat or whatever. If he was here now, he'd be ignoring all that," Daniel continues, gesturing to the wall of old Gibsons and Fenders in New King's Road Vintage Guitar Emporium. "He'd be looking at the Nationals, the Teiscos, the Silvertones, asking 'What's that? What does it sound like? Can I break the tremolo arm off it?'"

It's still perhaps a surprise to fans accustomed to seeing Rory blazing away with his iconic Stratocaster that so much of his guitar collection is taken up with these unusual instruments that weren't exactly trendy at the time – and a lot of it comes back to his deep

Mosrite
of California





“RORY LOVED COLLECTING BLUES MEMORABILIA – VINYL, POSTERS, PHOTOGRAPHS – AND HE WAS FASCINATED BY WHAT THE OLD BLUES GUYS WOULD PLAY”

THIS PAGE Note the Teisco’s ‘monkey grip’, a voguish feature predating Steve Vai’s signature Ibanez models by over two decades

love of blues and blues history. “Rory loved collecting blues memorabilia – vinyl, posters, photographs – and he was fascinated by what the old blues guys would play,” Daniel explains. “And they would play cheaper guitars, because that’s what they could afford. And so he would say: ‘Well I’ve got to get that, because that makes a great blues sound,’ rather than a luxury Les Paul or whatever.

“I remember hearing the story of how he was on the Blind Faith tour in New York, and he wanted a particular guitar, an old Kay I think, because he’d seen Lonnie Johnson playing one on an album cover. And he asked Clapton if he knew anywhere in New York where he could one of these guitars, and Clapton tells him to speak to this guy, John Hammond Jr, the blues player.

“So he met up with him, and John tells this lovely story about how they met for the first time and then went guitar shopping in New York in 1969. And they find the guitar in the attic of this guitar shop on like 32nd Street or something, and then John says to Rory: ‘Look man, they’ll try to pull something here because you’re foreign… I’ll take the guitar over – how much do you want to pay for it?’ And Rory says: ‘I don’t know, $50?’ ‘Right, we’ll get it for $50’.

“And so he goes up to the desk, asks this really New York owner how much he wants for it – $500. And he’s like, ‘No, it’s a piece of shit!’ and the owner is like, ‘Nah, $500.’

“And so Rory walks over and says: ‘Watch this…’ and he does the big Irish brogue – ‘Oh, I’ve come over from Ireland and I’ve been trying all day to find this guitar of my hero…’ giving it all that, and in the end the owner’s like, ‘Alright, $50’. John was like, ‘I still don’t know why he wanted it, it was a piece of shit!’ And think this was the late 60s in New York, you were tripping over all these golden-era Strats and Les Pauls and he was like, ‘Nope, I want a weird guitar with barely any wood for a bridge!’” G

Rory Gallager’s *Blues* is out now in both standard and deluxe three-disc formats via Chess/Universal. Special thanks to Rick at New Kings Road Vintage Guitar Emporium for providing the location for this feature

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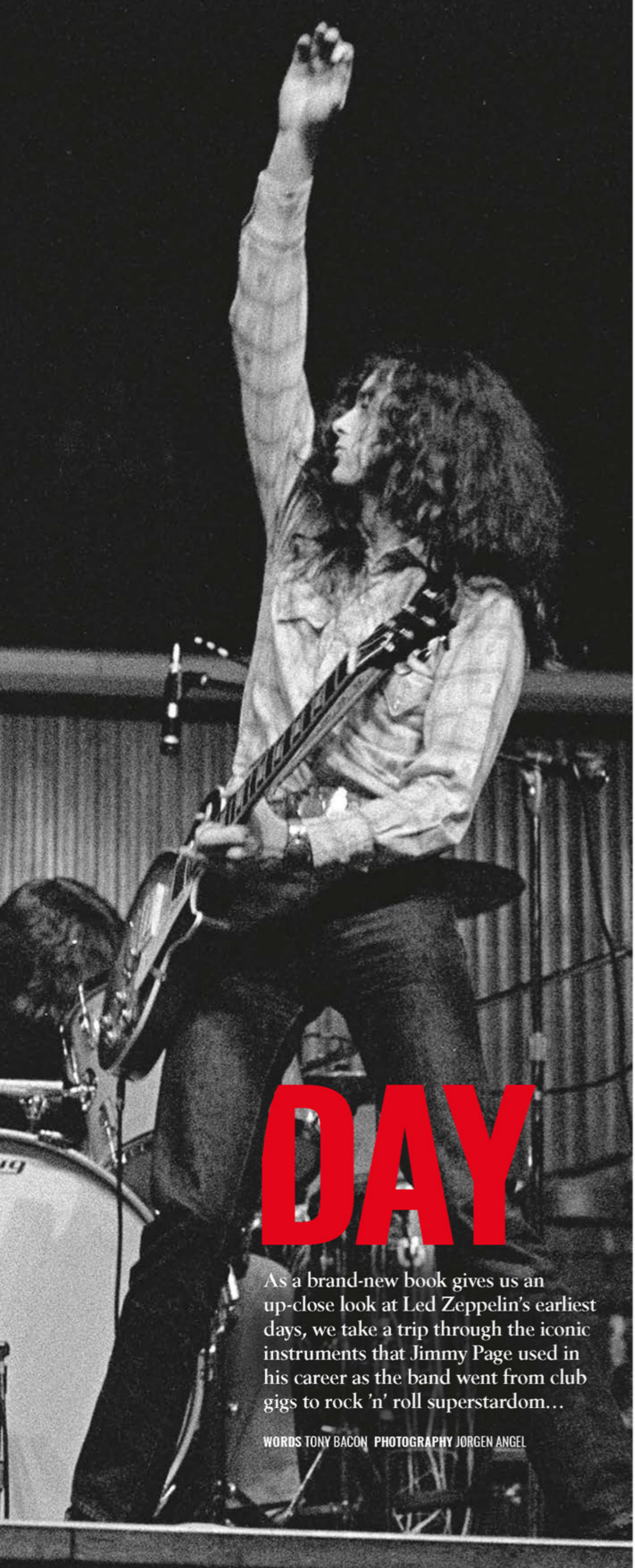


DAY

As a brand-new book gives us an up-close look at Led Zeppelin's earliest days, we take a trip through the iconic instruments that Jimmy Page used in his career as the band went from club gigs to rock 'n' roll superstardom…

WORDS TONY BACON **PHOTOGRAPHY** JØRGEN ANGEL

Any photographer worth their salt will tell you that being in the right place at the right time is an essential part of getting a great shot and for Jørgen Angel, the place was the Teen Club in Gladsaxe, Denmark and the date was 7 September 1968. Fans of Led Zeppelin will know the date and the venue well – it was the first time that Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, John Paul Jones and John Bonham played together live, fulfilling an existing contractual obligation to tour Scandinavia left over from Page's Yardbirds days.

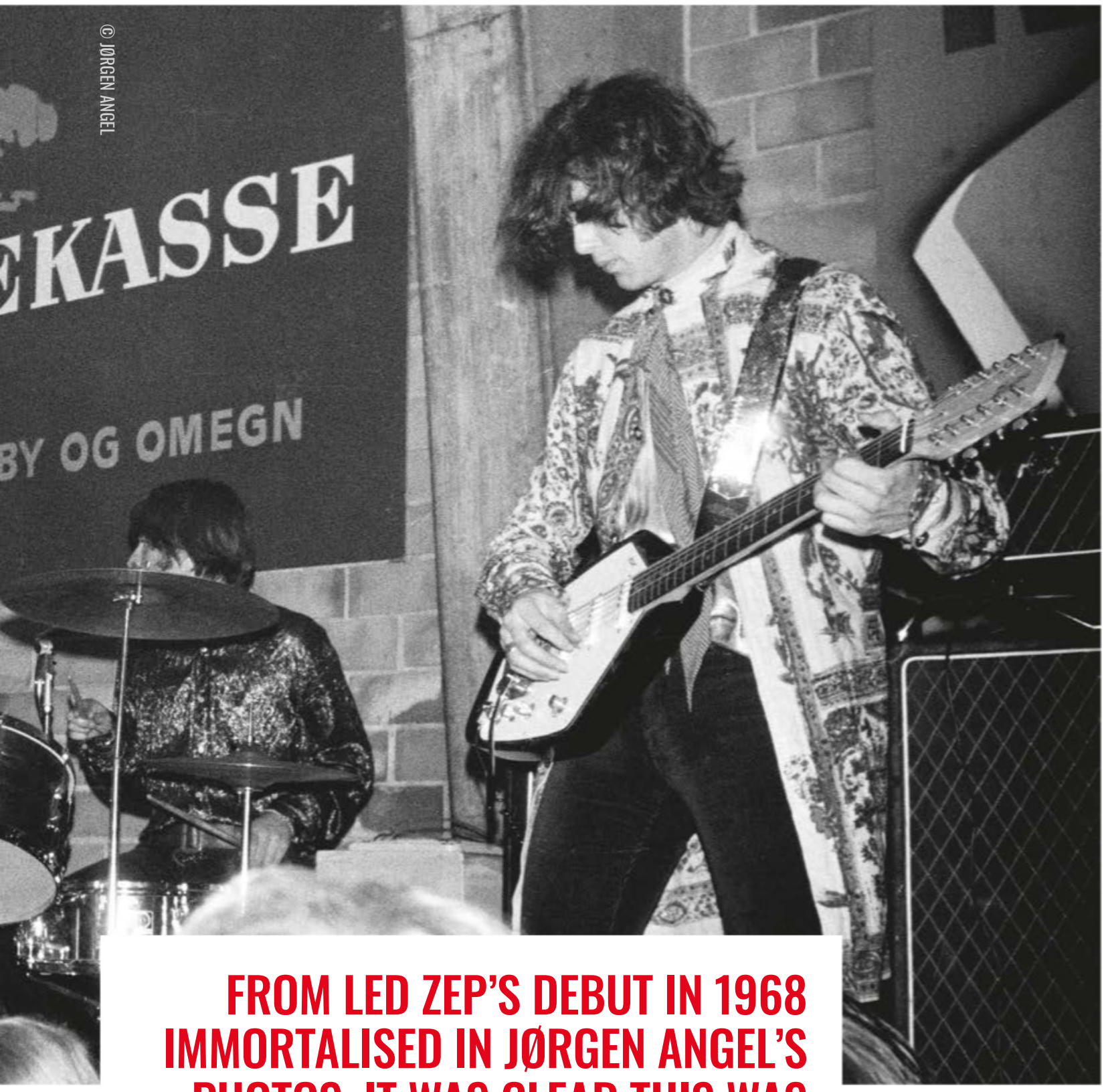
When Page and co rolled into town, Angel was an aspiring photographer who had become the Teen Club's in-house snapper and made a point of shooting the many bands that came through Gladsaxe. "I'd been looking forward to hearing The Yardbirds again, but when I arrived I saw a handwritten poster stating 'The New Yardbirds'!" he recalls. "Then I knew something was wrong. Imagine that you had bought tickets to The Beatles and then 'The New Beatles' turned up instead!

"Only one of the original members was left in the band – three completely unknown musicians. But when The New Yardbirds came on the stage and started playing, I was happily surprised by their energy. I was so captivated that I used a roll-and-a-half of film on them – and that was expensive for a school boy!"

But what Angel saw that night clearly made an impression and the young photographer decided that this new band would be worth documenting further – and so that's what he did. Through the photography collected in a brand-new book, *Led Zeppelin, Denmark 1968-70*, Angel charts the journey of the band from that first concert to becoming the biggest act in the world.

But Angel's book does more than showcase the rise of one of the greatest rock bands in history, it also documents the evolving guitar choices of the band's founder, Jimmy Page.

By the time Page formed Led Zeppelin in the late summer of 1968, he'd already been through quite a few guitars. As a schoolboy, he'd started with the inevitable Höfner, then moved onto a Futurama, which he played with Neil Christian & The



FROM LED ZEP'S DEBUT IN 1968 IMMORTALISED IN JØRGEN ANGEL'S PHOTOS, IT WAS CLEAR THIS WAS NO ORDINARY BAND. AND JIMMY'S GUITAR WAS NO ORDINARY TELE

PREVIOUS PAGE
Led Zeppelin were back in Denmark to play K.B. Hallen in Copenhagen on 28 February 1970

ABOVE, ABOVE RIGHT
The Yardbirds at Holte Hallen in Denmark, 15 April 1967. Jimmy Page is playing his 1967 Vox Phantom XII 12-string guitar and using a violin bow on his 'Mirror' Telecaster, the subject of a recent Fender tribute model

OPPOSITE Page and Plant at the Gladsaxe Teen Club, Denmark, on 15 March 1969. It's the same Tele, but Page has unleashed the 'Dragon'

Crusaders. He recalled flirtations with a Strat and a 6120 along the way and found himself a Harmony Sovereign acoustic.

For his job as a busy session guitarist on the 60s London circuit, he acquired a Les Paul Custom and a Danelectro 3021. Next, it was The Yardbirds, at first on bass playing the band's Epiphone Rivoli, then switching to guitar. It must have seemed like he'd really arrived. Little did he know what was in store…

1959 FENDER TELECASTER

Think of Jimmy Page in Led Zeppelin and probably the first guitar that comes to mind is a sunburst Les Paul, or maybe that spectacular double-neck. At first, however, he played a Telecaster that he brought with him from The Yardbirds. From Zep's first appearance in 1968 that's immortalised in Jørgen Angel's photos, it was clear that this was no ordinary band. And the guitar Jimmy played was no ordinary Tele, either.

In The Yardbirds, Jimmy had worked alongside Jeff Beck since joining in the summer of 1965 and when he shifted to guitar, he mostly played a Telecaster borrowed from Jeff. When Jeff left The Yardbirds at the end of 1966, he took his favoured Burst with him and left the Tele in Jimmy's hands. Its status as a 1959 example can be seen in the rosewood 'board and the top-loader bridge with optional string-through holes.

When Jimmy first began playing the Tele in The Yardbirds, it had its original finish, but during the early months of 1967 he decided it needed something more distinctive. Maybe he'd seen Syd Barrett's Esquire with its body covered in plastic sheeting and silver discs?

Jimmy said it was the use of mirrors in fashionable jackets and dresses of the day that inspired him to add eight mirror-finish discs to the front of his Tele's body and he enjoyed making them flash and glitter in the stage lights.

That look didn't last long, though, and a few months later – perhaps this time he'd seen Eric Clapton's painted 'Fool' SG? – Jimmy removed the discs, stripped the body down to natural figured ash and painted it with a design that's become known as the dragon. Jimmy said he exploited the way opposite

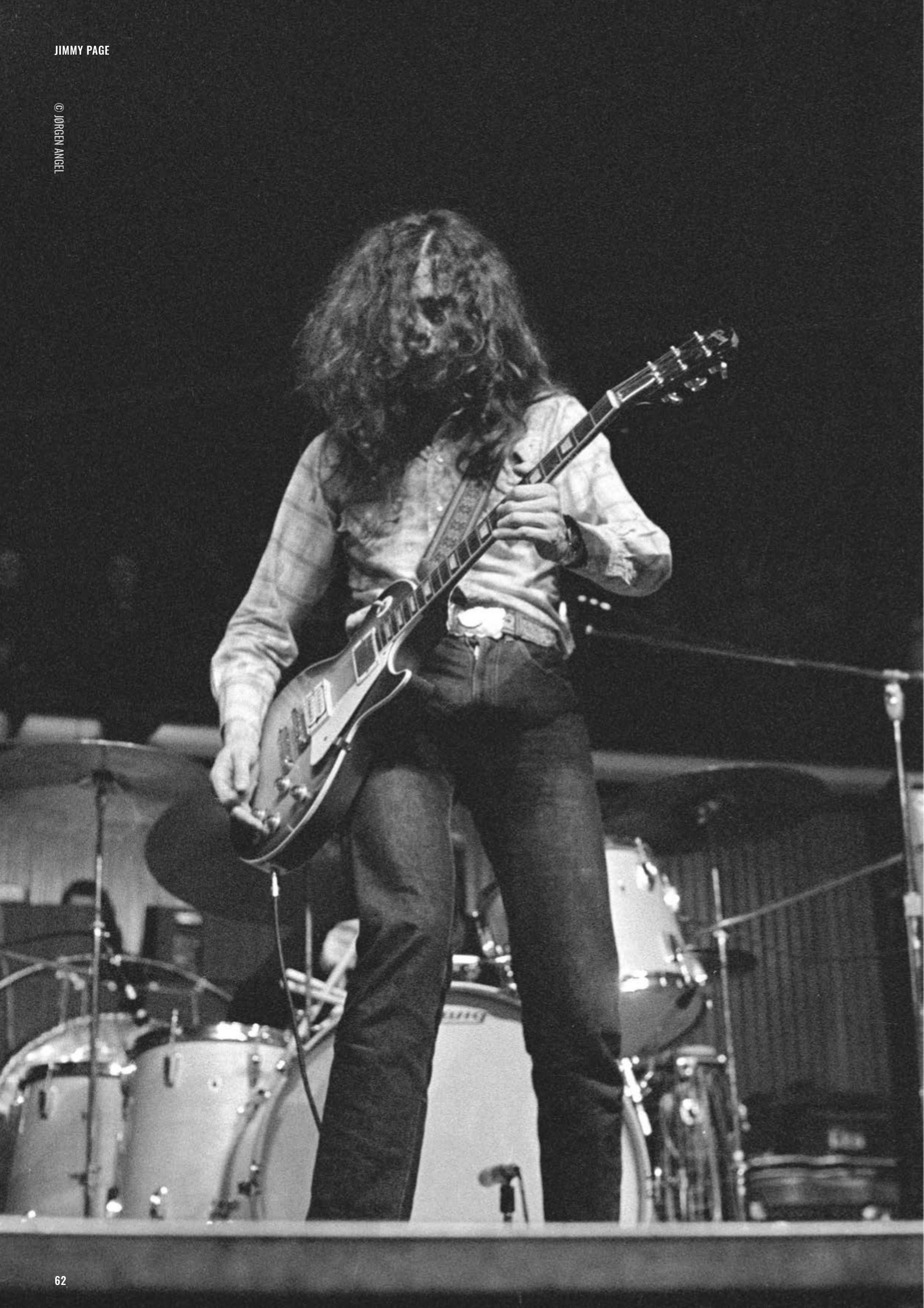
colours vibrate, in this case mostly red versus green. He replaced the pickguard with a transparent guard that had a sheet of film underneath to enhance the colourful vibe.

It was with this look that the Telecaster accompanied Jimmy when he formed Led Zeppelin and he used it to record the band's first album and on the gigs they played, from their debut in September 1968 through to April 1969. By that time, the road-weary Telecaster was coming to the end of its days, most evidently with a problematic pickup that was beginning to get on Jimmy's nerves.

Even the manager noticed: Peter Grant said later, without too much exaggeration, that every night on tour Jimmy had to get his soldering iron out to make the Telecaster serviceable. What he really needed was a different guitar to take him to the next phase of his career with Led Zeppelin.

There was, however, at least one further outing for the Telecaster with Zep. Around the turn of 1970 into '71, the band were in the studio and one of the pieces they were working on became *Stairway To Heaven*. When it came to the solo, Jimmy pulled out the Tele once more (no doubt checking first that the pickups were delivering properly). About six minutes

JIMMY PAGE



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into the marathon song, he built a logical, satisfying statement on his Telecaster that perfectly suited the lofty surroundings. It was a fitting close to this opening chapter of the story of his Led Zep guitars.

GIBSON LES PAULS

When Joe Walsh of the James Gang took a sunburst Les Paul to show Jimmy at a Zep date in America in 1969, Jimmy recognised that here was a potential replacement for his ailing Telecaster. The meeting most likely took place at the Fillmore West in San Francisco at the end of April. Jimmy bought the ex-Walsh Burst and was seen playing it straight away, certainly by the time Zep played Pasadena in the first few days of May.

He knew he had a gorgeous Les Paul and very soon it came to define his sound and his future with Zeppelin. More immediately, he knew that toward the end of May, the band would start work on their second album and he wanted just such a reliable, playable guitar for this important job.

The Burst remained Jimmy's favourite guitar through most of his time with Led Zep and eventually it would be known as 'Number 1' once he acquired others. Walsh had done some work to the guitar, including shaving its neck to an unusual profile. Jimmy described it as a "shallow neck" and in fact, it had been shaved almost to the truss rod in the centre section.

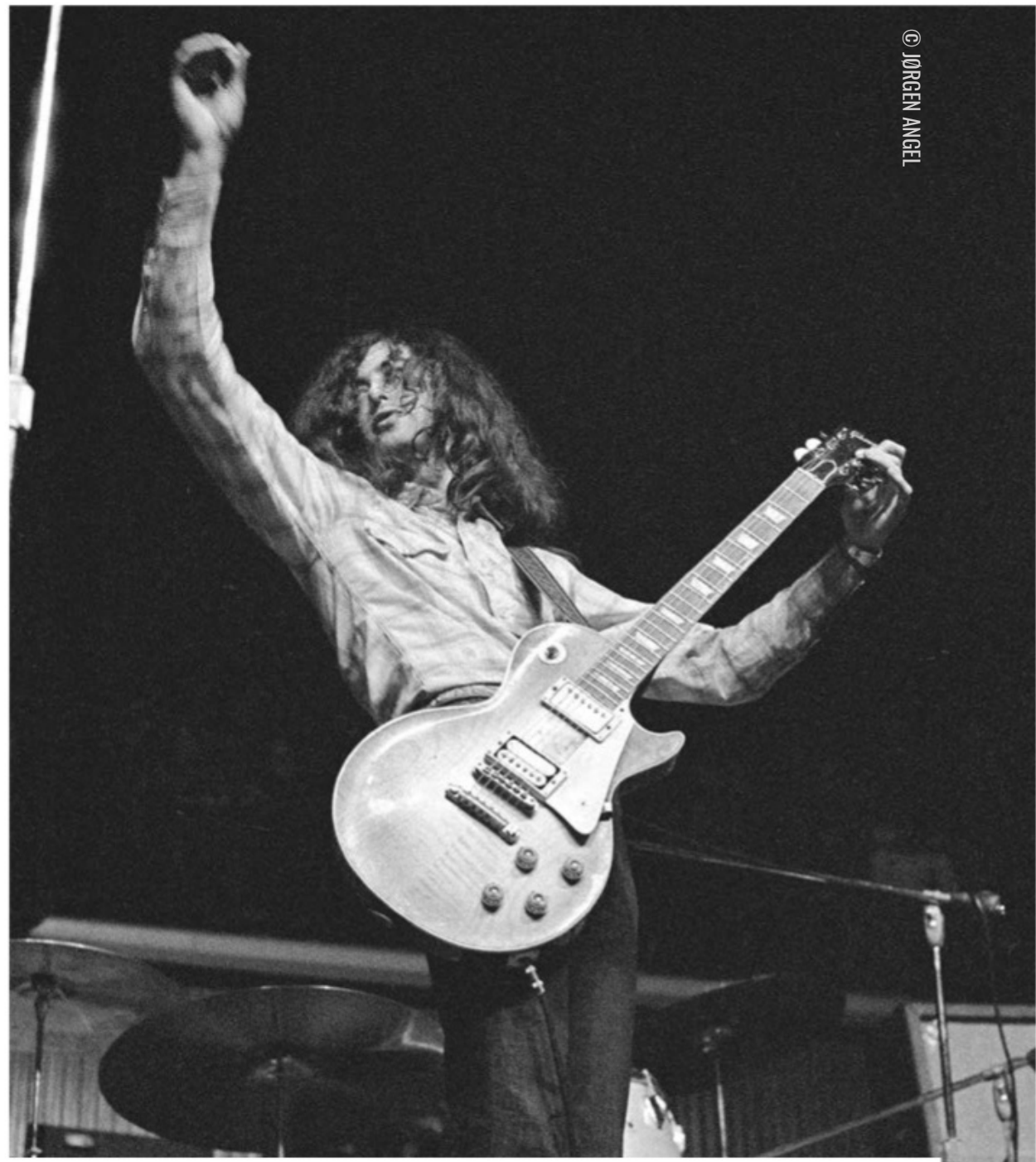
Roger Giffin, who later made a replica of Number 1 for Jimmy, told me the asymmetric profile was "like a section through an egg, deeper on the bass side than the treble". But it worked for its new owner and that's all that mattered.

Jimmy made a sensible mod by quickly changing the ex-Walsh guitar's tuners from the notoriously fragile originals to a robust set of gold-plated Grovers, a type that he was familiar with on his Les Paul Custom acquired back in the session days. The bridge-pickup cover came off, too, revealing double-white bobbins and the switch cap was in the wars, going through a few changes.

There's nothing unusual in any of this: it was a busy working guitar that otherwise held up very well. A headstock repair probably done during Walsh's ownership had removed the guitar's serial number, so an accurate production year will never be possible, though an educated guess would place Number 1 as probably a late '59 or early '60 example.

Jimmy got another Burst during his time in Led Zeppelin, probably in 1973, an instrument later known as 'Number 2'. This one was serial-numbered and clearly a 1959 model. He kept it mainly as a backup to Number 1, although he occasionally used it onstage, sometimes in alternate tuning for *Kashmir*.

Interviewers often asked Jimmy about his influences and he would talk passionately about rockabilly and blues. When the subject turned to Eric Clapton, he would say how Eric was among the first to develop and exploit the sound of a Burst plus a Marshall. But it was Jimmy who took that evolution further, putting his ex-Walsh Les Paul to use during Zep's time at the very top of the rock tree in the 1970s, onstage and in the studio.



"IT'S HYPOTHETICAL, BUT I MAY NOT HAVE COME UP WITH THE RIFF FOR *WHOLE LOTTA LOVE* ON THE TELE, THAT FAT SOUND YOU'RE WORKING WITH, YOU'RE INSPIRED. WELL, I AM"

THIS SPREAD By 1970, the 1959 Telecaster was replaced in Jimmy's affections by his iconic 1959 Les Paul Standard, bought from Joe Walsh the previous year

Not only did Jimmy and his Burst create an unforgettable onstage image, but in the studio he reminded a generation of guitarists and guitar fans just what a Les Paul could do in imaginative hands. For some, this would remain as the definitive combination of player and instrument.

"It's hypothetical, but I may not have come up with the riff of *Whole Lotta Love* on the Telecaster," Jimmy said when we discussed his Burst. "That fat sound you're working with, you are inspired – well, I am – and I know other people are, by instruments, the sound of the instruments. And then they're playing something they haven't played before and it's really user-friendly, and suddenly they've got some

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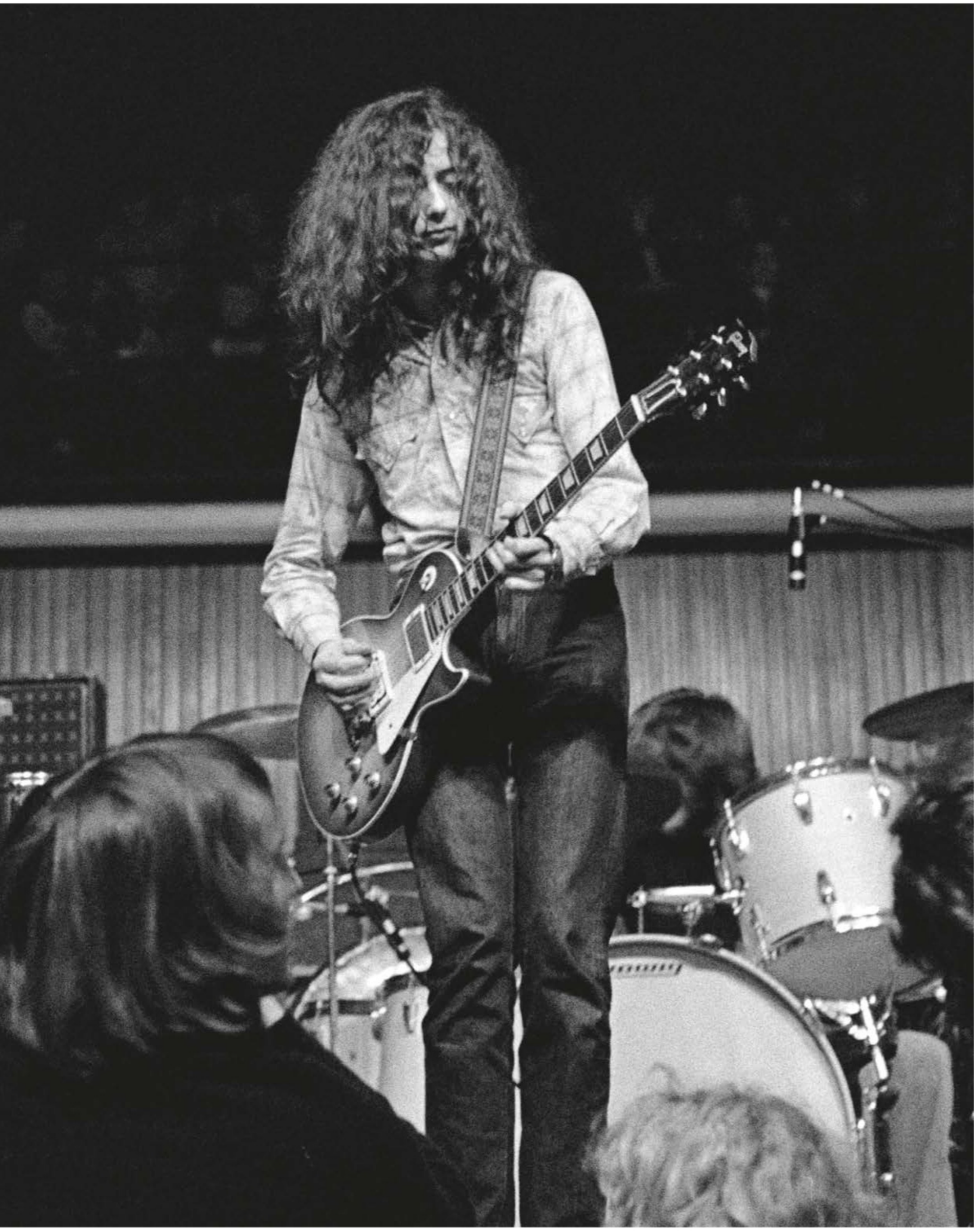


“I ALWAYS KNEW THE LES PAUL WAS A REALLY USER-FRIENDLY GUITAR OVER, SAY, A STRAT OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. IT’S REALLY SYMPATICO. SO MANY THINGS START SINGING”

PREVIOUS PAGE By the time they played this 1970 gig in Denmark, Led Zep were a stadium-sized rock machine with a hit-packed set

ABOVE Page acquired his Martin D-28 in 1970 and it became his go-to acoustic

OPPOSITE TOP *Led Zeppelin III*’s folkier sound saw Jimmy order a double-neck Gibson EDS-1275, which made its live debut in March 1971 and is seen here in Denmark two years later

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Led Zeppelin rock smoother attire at K.B. Hallen in 1973

sort of riff, which is peculiar to that moment. I’m not saying that’s the first thing I played on it, but it was to come. I always knew the Les Paul was a really user-friendly guitar over, say, a Strat or something like that. It’s really sympatico. So many things start singing, you know? Really singing.”

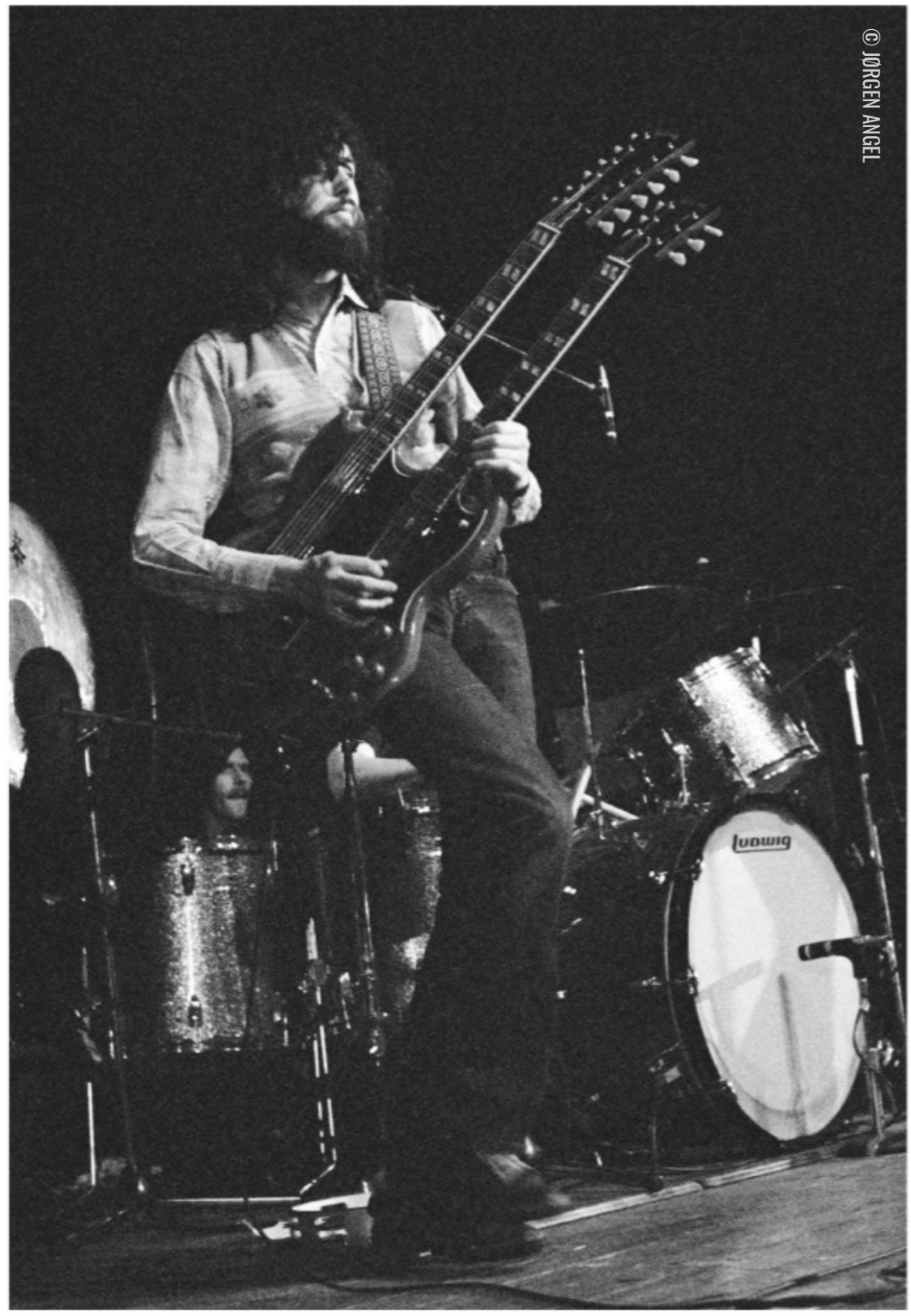
GIBSON EDS-1275

Jimmy famously used an electric 12-string to record the rhythm part on *Stairway To Heaven*, introducing it a little over two minutes into the song to strengthen his fingerpicked acoustic that opens the track. Naturally, the band intended to play this important piece live, but a problem quickly arose, not least because the recording also has the chiming 12-string leading straight into the six-string Telecaster solo. Even with Jimmy’s dexterity and skills, it looked like it would be hard to play *Stairway* live with just a single guitar in hand.

The solution came in the shape of a Gibson double-neck. Jimmy had seen pictures of American guitarists with similar concoctions: Grady Martin with a Bigsby double-neck, Joe Maphis with a Mosrite, though the inspiration came from a strange-looking band he’d seen somewhat closer to home. “I’d seen one in Family,” Jimmy said, “you remember Family? That guy had a double-neck.”

That guy was Charlie Whitney, the main guitarist in Family, who used a Gibson EDS-1275 six-and-12. Charlie had spotted a double-neck in a 60s Gibson catalogue and ordered one, which eventually arrived in Leicester in 1964.

Meanwhile, in 1971, Jimmy’s bandmates continued to tease him about the problem of reproducing live what they called the “guitar army” on the studio cut of *Stairway…*, so Jimmy, too, made a special order. A double-neck seemed the perfect compromise for live shows. “I asked to get one from Gibson, because I knew it was the only way,” Jimmy continued. “I knew I couldn’t do *Stairway…*, but it was essential to do it. So it became iconic, didn’t it?” If a little tough on the left shoulder. “Yeah, though I’ve got heavier guitars! But nevertheless, it was pretty weighty.”



Jimmy's EDS-1275 made its live debut in March 1971, allowing him to play 12-string and six-string parts without swapping guitars and it certainly did become iconic. The popularity of double-necks grew as other players saw Zep's guitarist toting the Gibson beast, so much so that Gibson reissued the EDS-1275 in 1975, again built only to special order.

JIMMY'S OTHER GUITARS

Jimmy used other guitars in Led Zeppelin beyond the three main electrics we've covered. His flat-top acoustics weren't often seen in performances, but of course he used them to good effect in the studio. For the first album, it's usually his Gibson J-200 we hear, but before the third album sessions he bought a Martin D-28 and this was one acoustic occasionally seen onstage.

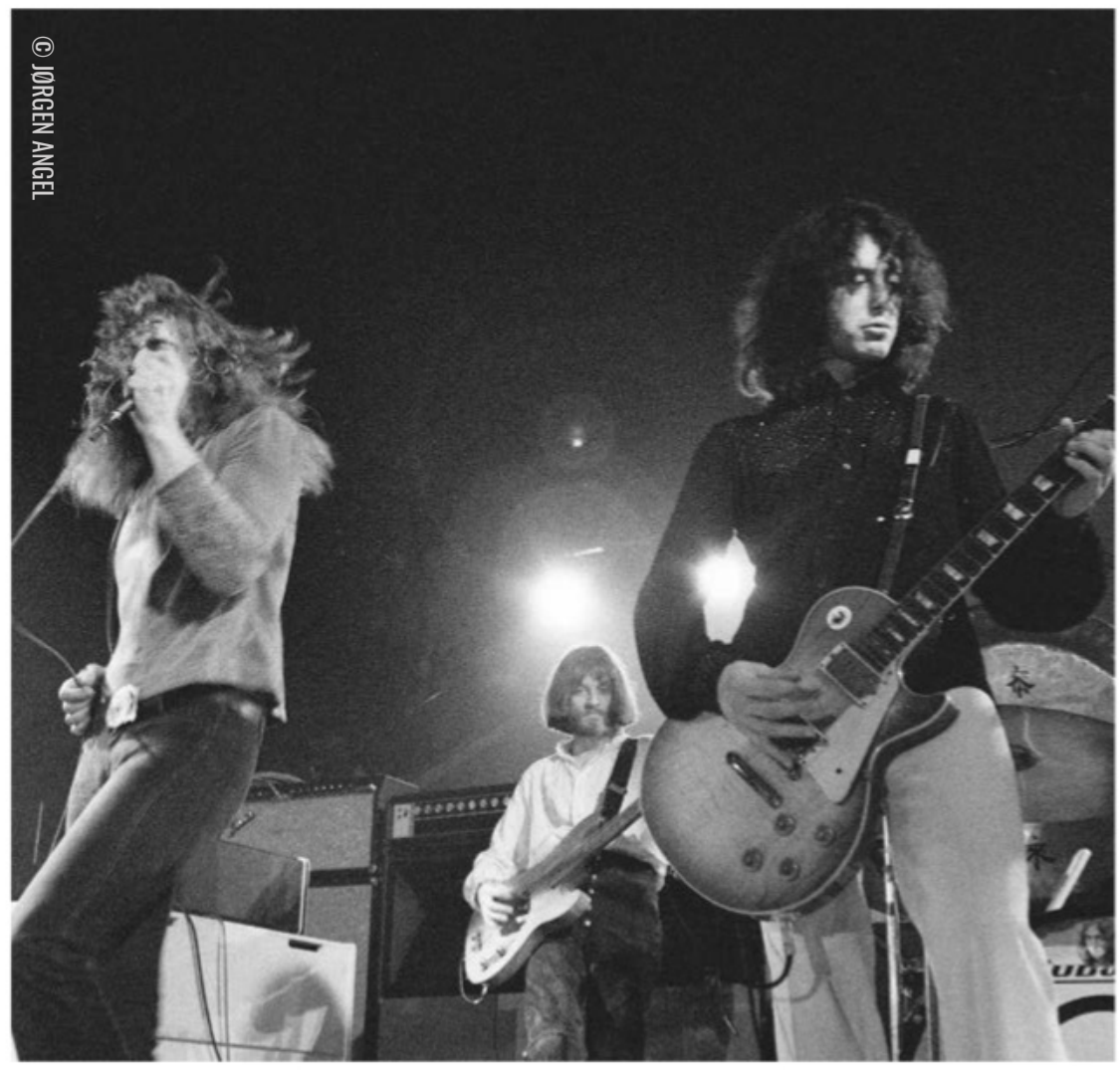
He first used his D-28 live in summer 1970, mic'd up for pieces like *Bron-Yr-Aur*, while for later tours he had it fitted with a Barcus Berry pickup. He acquired a second D-28 later in the 70s, intended for pieces that required an alternate tuning.

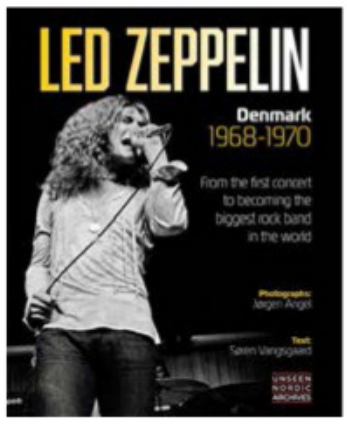
Jimmy had a couple of 12-string electrics – a Vox and a Fender. They were almost exclusively for studio use, although he did play his Vox Phantom XII now and again live with The Yardbirds, as can be seen in Jørgen's Yardbirds gig images.

A further electric was Jimmy's distinctive black-and-white Danelectro Standard 3021, another of the guitars he'd owned since his session days back in the 60s. With Zep, he used it live primarily in alternate tuning for *White Summer/Black Mountain Side* as well as a few other songs.

Dano Standards are known also as 'Short Horn' models, which not only relates obviously to the shape of the body, but also to the name that Danelectro gave to a matching bass.

"I knew when it came to the time of Led Zeppelin, I knew *exactly* what I wanted to do," Jimmy told me, "exactly how I was going to go about it, exactly what material. The stage was already set, the scene was set, because I'd played all those underground clubs with The Yardbirds, there was the elements of it in there. There was an audience for it, if I got a good band together. And I didn't just get a good band, I had a phenomenon together. It was really exciting! Imagine!"





***Led Zeppelin Denmark: 1968-70* with photography by Jørgen Angel and words by Søren Vangsgaard is out now via Flying V Books**

THE GUITAR INTERVIEW

KIEFER SUTHERLAND

Fresh from the release of his second studio album *Reckless & Me*, we sit down with the star of *24*, *Flatliners* and *The Lost Boys* to discuss the parallels between onscreen and onstage storytelling, how he was bitten by the guitar-collecting bug at an early age and why you should never let 'em catch you lying…

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PORTRAITS ELEANOR JANE
GROOMING CIONA JOHNSON-KING AT AARTLONDON

The Groucho Club in London's Soho seems a fitting venue for an encounter with a genuine Hollywood star. Yet once we wind our way upstairs to the room in which our interview takes place – with its own bar, fireplace and a striped wall painted by Turner Prize nominee Ian Davenport – Kiefer Sutherland's unaffected demeanour almost makes us forget for a moment that the unmistakable weatherworn voice we're listening to is familiar to millions.

With album number two in the can, Sutherland is in Europe to play a short acoustic tour. Billed as 'Kiefer Sutherland Up Close', the intimate dates include audience Q&A sessions, while the award-winning Canadian actor and singer-songwriter also tells some of the stories behind his songs. If there's a common thread running through his work in film and television and the country-fried rock that's also close to his heart, it's storytelling: "I think for the longest time I've tried to find the common denominator of what I love about acting and what I love about music, and at the root of it is the storytelling. Getting together with a group of actors and a director and a cinematographer to tell a story, or getting together with a group of musicians to tell a story. The big difference is that the songs are really personal and from my life. And I think that it took me a minute to adjust to the fact that there was no character in between me and an audience – there was just me."

Does that make it more nerve-wracking?
"Oh man, my hand was shaking so badly! As an actor, if you're nervous, you just put your hands in your pockets. As a guitar player that doesn't work so well! Every step of it has been a kind of challenge to overcome… whatever fears one person has, they've all had to be confronted on some level during this process. We've played 300 shows in the last two-and-a-half years, it was kind of a 'sink or swim' thing, but it's been one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had in my life."

Winding the clock back a little, how did your love affair with the guitar begin?
"I played violin from the time I was four. I wanted a guitar desperately when I was seven and my mum said: 'If you play violin until you are 10, I'll get you a guitar.' And I played the violin until my 10th birthday and she kept her word and got me a guitar and then I never picked the violin up again!

"And then I just took [the guitar] with me everywhere. It was a terrible Yamaha acoustic, it was a piece of crap and the fucking action was so high, but by the time I could start playing barre chords, my hands were quite strong 'cause of that guitar. I remember I used to pawn Christmas gifts, and I would take whatever money I had made and I would get to the guitar store and I would put a downpayment on very funny guitars.

"I saw one last year that I hadn't seen in forever, a Gibson Sonex. It was such a cheap kind of version of a Les Paul. I just remember that, as a kid, I was always trying to get a guitar, or work my way up to getting a good one. I can't remember a time really where I wasn't either chasing a guitar or playing."

Was collecting guitars a natural progression?
"At first, it was very practical. You wanted a Strat, you wanted a Tele and you wanted a Les Paul. The

big mistake I made was, we had a studio and I got the kind of cases where you would have all the guitars out, and you'd go, 'Well, there's two slots missing there. I know exactly what I'd like to fill that with.' And before you knew it, you had 80 to 100 guitars.

"Some people collect baseball cards, some people collect cars or art. For me, guitars are that. They're beautiful works of art. And what I found so interesting was every guitar makes you play differently. For whatever reason, you pick up that guitar and there's a specific goal you want from your playing. But I got to the point that I had so many, I wasn't able to play them all. That's when I went, 'Well, this is ridiculous, they all need to be played'.

"I had real vintage guitars but they were all bought for playability. I never had a guitar that was a collectible guitar but didn't play really well. And so at some point I just went, 'Well if you can't play them, then they need to go to someone else who will.' And so I brought the collection down to really about 20 guitars. And I use all of them."

"EVERY GUITAR MAKES YOU PLAY DIFFERENTLY. FOR WHATEVER REASON, YOU PICK UP THAT GUITAR AND THERE'S A SPECIFIC GOAL YOU WANT FROM YOUR PLAYING"

What are some of your favourite guitars from the collection?

"I have two 1954 Les Paul Juniors, one a TV Yellow and one a sunburst. I have three guitars that I go out on the road with, a Gibson Dove, a Gibson Hummingbird and in the UK or in Europe I have a Fano, with a Seymour Duncan Hot Rails in the back, and then in the States I have a Tele with a Hot Rails in the back and that's really the only pickup I use.

"There's one that I haven't played a lot, which is a 1967 Firebird. And the fact that it's original and that it didn't break its neck… it's such a rare thing. I don't pull that out a lot. But the guitar that I use the most is the Tele, electric-wise. Just 'cause if I do need that front humbucker, it's quite versatile. But live, I just tend to use the Seymour Duncan back pickup."

Who were the guitar players you admired when you were growing up?

"I was a big fan of Peter Frampton. I thought he was an incredible guitar player. And then obviously Jimmy Page was a huge, huge influence. I liked the melodic quality, even though Led Zeppelin was a very hard rock band, there was a melodic quality to Jimmy Page's guitar playing that I thought was incredible, and the same with Pink Floyd. I can sing the solos from Pink Floyd as well as I can sing the lyric of any of their songs. I enjoyed that more than the Eddie Van Halen kind of stuff. I was not as attracted to that as I was David Gilmour or Jimmy Page.

"And then Jeff Beck's earlier stuff with Rod Stewart when he was a blues player, as opposed to the incredible place that he's gone to, but I just really liked the simplicity when he was playing the blues. Eric Clapton is another one. Duane Allman is another one. And then I would have to say my favourite guitar player is Prince. Again, his craftsmanship with his guitar, melody – he was an extraordinary player."

Where did the country-rock influence in your own material come into the mix?

"Well, it's a combination of things. Bob Seger. Jackson Browne. Those kinds of writers. Lynyrd Skynyrd. They were huge influences for me, just as a listener, but then what I loved about country music was that, as a writer, they sing stories. *A Boy Named Sue* is a perfect example. That has a beginning, a middle and an end. And so, I enjoyed that a great deal, and so, singer-songwriters like Bob Seger or Jackson Browne, Bob Dylan, they did that too – Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings. All of those artists, they told stories, and so I just naturally gravitated towards that because that's the way I like to write.

"What I end up doing versus the range of things that I listen to is very different. But as a writer, it again goes back to the storytelling and I like to have a beginning, a middle and an end to something that's quite direct. Pink Floyd's another great example where so much of their music is metaphorical. Mine is not. Mine is pretty straightforward."

How did the sessions for the *Reckless & Me* album come together?

"It was actually really cool. I was doing a television show called *Designated Survivor*, and so we had very limited time, so I would fly into Los Angeles. We recorded at Capitol Records, which was really cool, in Studio A. There's a picture of me standing in front of a picture of Paul McCartney standing in front of Frank Sinatra! So you couldn't not be aware of the significance of where you were.

"Jude [Cole, Sutherland's producer and co-writer] put together an incredible group of players – Waddy Wachtel on guitar, Jim Cox on piano, Brian MacLeod on drums. Jude and I would go back and forth on guitar, Jude played some bass and we had a couple other guys come in, but we would do five tracks in two days.

"So we did half the record in one go and then Jude would take the stuff back to his studio and kind of put on a little accordion piece or mandolin piece and kind of fill it out from there. And then about seven weeks later, I came back and did the other five in two

Gibson

days and even though it was stretched out, we kind of recorded the record in really a few weeks."

Are you expecting the songs to evolve on the road?
"Not really. We try to play the record, because that's why we made it. We're not a jam band. I always loved that line from Tom Petty, 'Don't bore us, get to the chorus!'. I went and saw a Ramones show when I was in my early 20s and I loved the fact that none of the songs were more than two-and-a-half minutes. It just kept driving that show. The interesting thing about the second record is that the entire record was centred around what I wanted for a setlist. I kept thinking, 'If we had an uptempo song here, or that kind of a ballad, this would make the set really good.' So it was really interesting writing the second record with purpose. It was really, 'How do we make the show better?'. I think that worked out for us."

Which songwriters would you like to work with in the future and what would be a dream collaboration?
"Chris Stapleton is an incredible writer. *Whiskey And You* is still one of the saddest, most heartfelt songs I've heard in the last 10 years. And I just think he's a wonderful writer. Colter Wall, who wrote *Sleeping On The Blacktop*, I think that's an incredible song.

"One of my favourite writers of all time would be Paul Simon and I would give a left foot to just be able to sit with him and even ask him about his process. The nice thing about playing and writing is that there's no endgame. There's no finish line. There's no, 'I finally did it'. It's just a process that you'll have with you for the rest of your life. And if you accept that, then that's a really precious gift. The same thing goes for at least my experience with acting – there's no moment that you cross the finish line and go, 'Oh, I'm great'.

"It's always a process of trying to get better and figure something out. Having said that, I can read a script and go on a set and after 35 years, I have a very, very strong idea of what I'm going to do with it. My experience with music, at least at this present moment, is that there's so much that I'm still learning that it makes you feel almost young, because the learning curve is so great.

"And you can write a song, but there's a thousand different ways to play it. That's kind of awesome, to know that it's that pliable."

Did the veteran musicians you worked with on *Reckless & Me* dispense any pearls of wisdom?
"No one's ever really given me advice. Really, the only advice that I would give or accept is the same kind of advice that I would have with regards to acting. And the only person who ever gave me advice with that was my dad. He said: 'Don't ever let 'em catch you lying, 'cause if they do, they'll never forgive you for it.' And he was right, and what he meant was, that if there's a moment in a script and it says, 'and the character cries', if you don't feel that, play something different. Because if you fake the crying, you'll get caught. And it's the same with music – if what you're singing is something that's authentic, and something that you actually feel, then people will understand that. If you try and become manipulative with it, they'll understand that, too. So I think, more than anything: play, write, sing something that matters to you."

Are there songs by other artists you enjoy playing because they resonate with you in a similar way?
"Yeah, Bob Dylan *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* I've played forever. And I tell a story about my dad and my sister. When my mum and dad got divorced, my mum had to go back to Canada to find a place for us to live, and so for about six months, we were left alone with our dad. And my mum, she was kind of the strict one, and my dad had kind of no rules or regulations and so it was a really kind of wonderful time. And he played this Bob Dylan best-of on 8-track, and I just remember all those songs, being driven to school when I was kid, and so I'll play that."

Finally, with such a heavy touring schedule ahead, is there a danger that you might get sick of life on the road with the other guys in the band?
"Trust me, if the last 300 shows didn't kill us, the next 300 aren't going to do us any damage…" G

Kiefer Sutherland and his band return to the UK in July. Visit kiefersutherland.net for tickets

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1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
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TIMOTHY SHOWALTER

CRISIS CAPITAL

Timothy Showalter was done. Despite the acclaim that greeted Strand Of Oaks' fifth album, *Hard Love*, the guitarist and songwriter found himself in a hole, and was on the verge of quitting music altogether. Then his friends in My Morning Jacket decided to pull him out, dragging him into the studio and providing an elite backing band to create his most impressive album yet, *Eraserland*

WORDS JOSH GARDNER **PHOTOGRAPHY** CRYSTAL LUDWICK

ABOVE Timothy Showalter was called out of the blue to discover that his friends from My Morning Jacket had booked studio time to record with him

"I didn't really wanna do it anymore," says Timothy Showalter, the artist also known as Strand Of Oaks. That's quite an attention-grabbing admission, but in these clickbait-heavy times, he's keen to emphasise that this isn't just a good marketing line. "It's not for dramatic press. I know that's how this game works – put a fireworks show up so people wanna write about it. But when I was trying to explain the record to people, that's the only way that I could. I think it was an identity crisis."

Back in 2017, Tim was promoting and touring his new album, *Hard Love*, but despite the album being well received by both critics and fans, something wasn't right. "I released *Hard Love* a year after I made it, and I was singing about someone who I wasn't anymore," he reflects. "I was pretty wild for a little while there. But over the course of that year making *Hard Love* and being home, I changed in a good way. I loved the record and playing those songs live, but I had this idea of, 'What am I doing? I've been doing this for 10 years. Who am I?'"

The changes may have been positive, but it coincided with Tim finding himself stuck in a rut, and unable to write new material, which in turn brought up a host of other issues. "Most of my life, playing guitar and singing, and writing songs, was an escape route out of anxiety and life," he admits candidly. "That was my safe place… and then I was like, 'Shit…' Because being a musician is most of my identity – if you were to speak to friends or family, they would say: 'Oh, he was really depressed.' Like clinically depressed! But I equated it to, 'I'm just not feeling the tunes right now!'"

Such was Tim's disconnect from music at this time, he barely registered his label's decision to take the wealth of unused material from the *Hard Love* sessions to create a brand-new album, *Harder Love*, which came out in 2018. "I forget that *Harder Love* even came out!" he exclaims. "I had very little to do with that. There was some good stuff on there, and the label kind of approached me and said: 'People should at least hear these songs…' And I'm like, 'That sounds good. I'm gonna hike in the woods for a while!'"

JACKET REQUIRED

And then something quite remarkable happened. "I got a phone call from my manager saying: 'Are you making a record with My Morning Jacket?' And I went, 'What are you talking about?!'" Tim remembers. "He said: 'WelI, I just got a call from all of them and they say they have studio time booked…' and I didn't have any songs written!"

Renowned indie-rock bands don't just go around booking studio time with songwriters on a whim, and

"WE REALLY SET OURSELVES UP FOR FAILURE, BECAUSE WE'D NEVER PLAYED TOGETHER BEFORE! BUT OUTSIDE OF MAYBE A FEW OVERDUBS, EVERYTHING WAS LIVE"

THIS SPREAD Shots from the sesions at La La Land studios in Louisville, Kentucky, where *Eraserland* was recorded

what was actually happening was something of a rock 'n' roll intervention… "They're friends of mine, and the producer Kevin [Ratterman] is also a dear friend, and to their endless credit they caught wind that I wasn't in a good spot, and they dropped everything," he reflects wistfully. "For Chrissakes, Bo [Koster] the keyboard player… he's Roger Waters' keyboard player! And he had two weeks off in the midst of the *The Wall* Tour, and he decided to spend those two weeks with me in a studio in Louisville. It's the last place he should have been – he should have been on a fuckin' beach or something!

"My epiphany truly started when all these people started to come to my aid, and my first inclination was, 'I need to write good songs, 'cos I can't give this band mediocre shit!' So I began writing the opposite of how I usually write – unselfishly! It gave me enough room to get out of my own head, and because of that, it became a pure form of expression that I couldn't have planned on. And the songs just came – I don't know where from! I still need to learn chords for half of them. I don't remember writing them. I hope I did!"

Working with a very short deadline was a new one for Tim – "Sometimes I've written songs where there's like a three-year gap between writing a song and putting out a record," he admits – and with just a few short weeks to write an album, he headed for the beach to write… "I love beaches in the off-season," Tim explains. "I don't know why, it's just romantic. It looks like death, but a beautiful death! And the songs just kinda varied depending on my mood from day to day, or even what the weather was like at the beach! Like if it was a rainy day, it would be more introspective, but if it was sunny, the major chords would come flying. It all happened so fast."

FINDING SPACE

If the writing and demoing process was a breeze, when it came to recording, the reality of the shoes he was filling rendered things a lot less comfortable. "I had a panic attack the first day at the studio, because we recorded everything live in this huge room, and I was standing where [MMJ frontman] Jim

James should be standing!" Tim recalls. "And if anyone knows Jim James, I can't sing like him – 99 per cent of the planet that's ever existed can't sing like him. I'm like, 'What am I doing here!? I shouldn't be allowed in this party!'

"But that night, the guys went for dinner and I stayed at the studio because I wanted to get my guitar tone working. And while I was there on my own, I walked around the studio and I saw that they all had extensive notes that they'd written. That to me, was like this moment of like, 'Oh, they are *so* involved with this.' This is not like when a label sets you up with a bunch of studio musicians. These are friends and they're invested. Yes, they're extremely accomplished and you look up to them, but this is not the moment to be starstruck. This is the moment to collaborate."

With that hurdle overcome, the chemistry between Tim and the rest of the band was immediate and the recording process was remarkably smooth. "It's a testament to what good musicians they are," he says. "We really set ourselves up for failure, because we'd never played together before! But outside of maybe a few overdubs, everything was live. Even if it was nine minutes long. That's the performance."

Operating with that one-take mindset really gave Showalter an appreciation for how good his new backing band was, and one member in particular. "Tommy [Blankenship], the bass player, is a perfect bass player." he insists. "After five days, a few of us went out for dinner, and he went somewhere else, and we had this realisation… 'Guys, Tommy hasn't messed up yet…' He never hit a wrong note! You're supposed to do something wrong, to make everyone else feel better! It's like, 'Tommy, please, I messed up my own lyrics on that last track!'"

STRICTLY RHYTHM

When it came to the album's guitar sounds, Tim found himself in the unusual position of not being the primary lead guitarist, with MMJ's Carl Broemel filling that chair. "Usually, I have a 'space station' pedalboard and everything. But my stuff was really simple, it was strictly for rhythm," Tim says. "I was mostly playing a Frankenstein Telecaster – for some reason I put mini-humbuckers on it – through what looked like a Magnatone, but with a single 12 in it – I don't know if one of Kevin's friends made it or what."

Taking a back seat on the lead-guitar side did give Showalter a chance to appreciate the creativity and uniqueness of Broemel's playing, however… "He has a Duesenberg that's like a tour de force of tone," Tim enthuses. "But his secret is that he would be sitting down in front of this pedalboard, and he had an Echoplex. And as he was soloing on stuff like *Weird Ways* or *Forever Chords*, his right hand was constantly working that as he was playing."

Showalter has a reputation as a fan of extended jams, exploratory solos and a general tendency to wig out whenever possible, but by not really playing solos on the album, he began to look at things from a different perspective. "The thing I love about *Eraserland* is there's very little jamming," he says. "It's extremely structured, and I think that to me always felt unappealing in the past. But when you think about *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, in your memory, it's almost as if Gilmour is soloing the whole time. Like an epic jam. But then when you go back and listen to it, it's actually so composed and orchestrated. In my past records, like *Hard Love*, I was just like, 'Let's just jam, fuck it all, start the track!' And that was fun and all, but for something like *Forever Chords*, we had it down to a measure. Technically, there are only like three solos on this album."

ISBELL OF THE BALL

One of those three solos was reserved for a very special guest – Jason Isbell. The guitarist is another

“JASON ISBELL SOUNDS LIKE HE’S EATING HIS GUITAR! HOW IS HE DOING THAT?! AND IT WAS BONE DRY – NO DELAY OR REVERB, OR ANYTHING, JUST DEADLY TONE”

RIGHT The mini-humbucker-laden “Frankenstein” Telecaster which Showalter used for the majority of the album’s parts

friend who wanted to help Tim get back in the saddle, and leant his considerable skills to the track *Moon Landing*.

“Jason and I go way back,” Tim explains. “I played shows with him maybe 10 years ago? We’ve remained friends and played off and on together since, and he’s a wonderful person. He has such a beautiful voice and writes award-winning songs, and we sent him the most crazy and dissonant song on the record.

“He really wanted to be on it, but was touring so he couldn’t come to Louisville, so we sent him the track after we were done with it, and we were like, ‘Well, what’s he gonna do with *this*?’ And then he came back with like a Hendrix-level *Machine Gun* solo! And I’m most proud of that – because you see it with him live, but I want more people to know that he’s one of the most inventive players around.

“My god, if you listen to the raw track of *Moon Landing* and his solo, there’s things in there that sound like he’s eating his guitar or something! How is he doing that?! And it was bone dry – no delay or reverb, or anything, just deadly tone. Love that.”

LAND OF PLENTY

After coming so close to giving up before *Eraserland* reignited his love of music, we can’t help but conclude our chat by asking Tim how he’s feeling now… “I wanna make more records,” he affirms. “But I have to put this album to rest as a piece of art in order to open my brain up to make the new. I always tell friends that the two weeks after I get the master, I have this golden moment where I listen to my own record, and I listen to it, and I like it… and then it’s done forever. I’ve given it to the people.

“It feels good to know that maybe in six months, I’ll be able to maybe start the next one, but I just need to have that moment to let go. It took me a long time to let go of *Hard Love*, but that enabled me to do this, which was such a positive experience. Hopefully, I won’t have to go through that again this time, though… these dramatic stories, I’m just tired of them!” G

***Eraserland* by Strand Of Oaks is out now on Dead Oceans**

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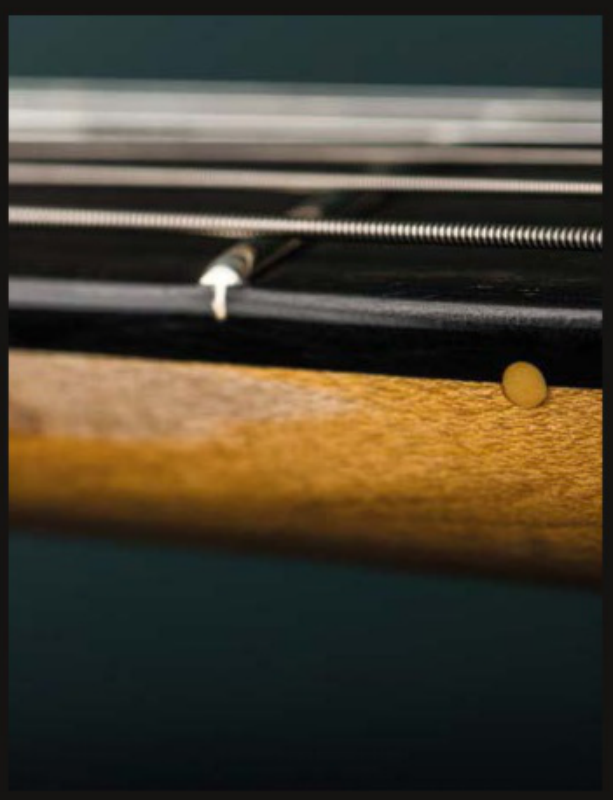
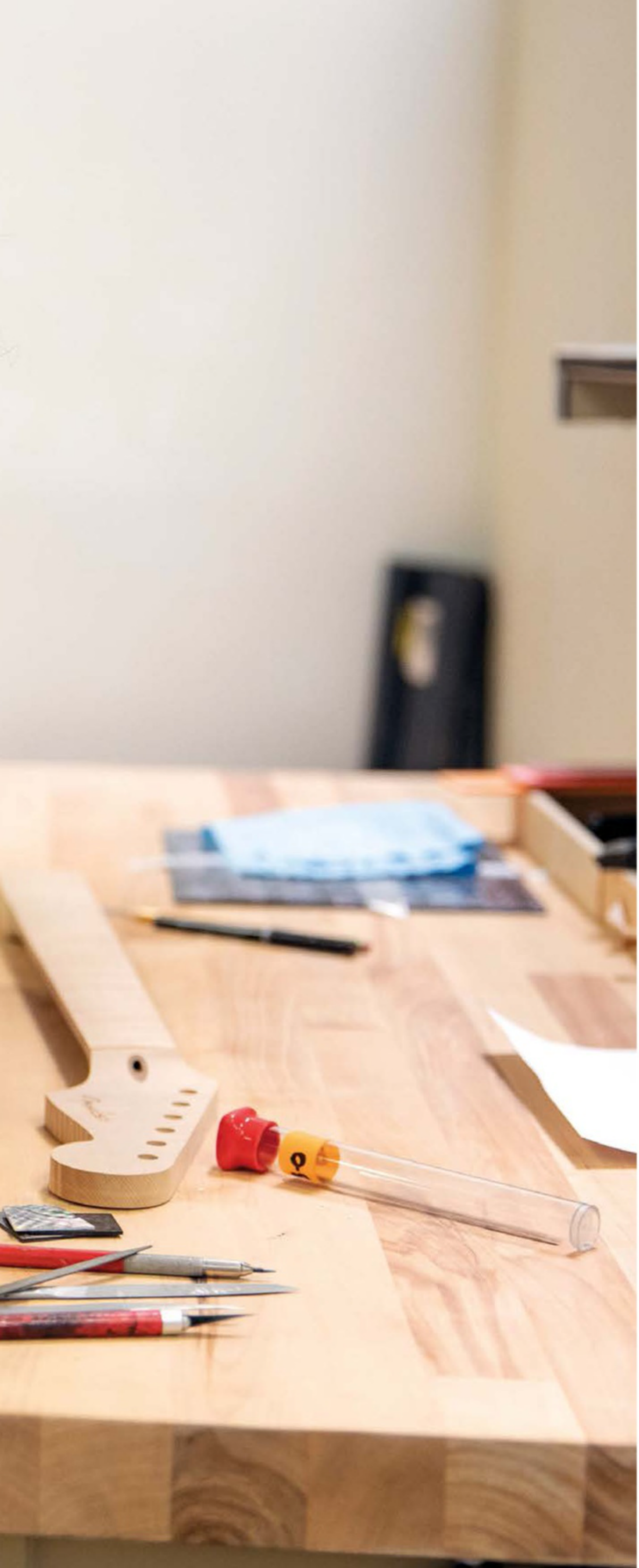
THE MONEY SHOT
FENDER CUSTOM SHOP RON THORN MASTERBUILT THINLINE TELECASTER

70 years on from its first prototype incarnation, here's a stellar example of what one of the leading lights of Fender's Custom Shop can do with the Telecaster format here in 2019. Commissioned by our friends at Coda Music in Stevenage, UK, this Masterbuilt Ron Thorn Thinline is resplendent in a stunning two-tone Deep Cherry Metallic/Frost Gold relic'd nitrocellulose finish over a semi-hollow ash body.

Lollar Gold Foil neck and TV Jones Power'Tron bridge pickups combine to deliver a premium blend of clarity, grit and complex harmonics while the neck's '65 Strat C-profile and ebony fingerboard provide a smooth, comfortable ride.

At £6,499, this is clearly a serious investment, but everything about this instrument oozes with the level of finesse you'd expect from a world-renowned luthier. Visit coda-music.com for more details about this guitar, or to spec out a similar Custom Shop dream machine of your very own. G





SHOP TALK

RON THORN

FENDER CUSTOM SHOP PRINCIPAL MASTER BUILDER

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

Meet one of the world's most skilled guitar-makers and inlay artists, whose exceptional creations are some of the best and most imaginative designs the Californian "hot-rod shop" has to offer

The boutique guitar world is rife with specialists: those who do modern set-neck fusion machines, or down 'n' dirty rock warriors, or presentation guitars with exotic woods and elaborate inlays, or hot-rodded bolt-necks. Ron Thorn does all of the above, and more – and he nails everything he touches with a rare blend of precision and soul. No wonder Fender's Custom Shop made him Principal Master Builder.

As well as the talent and unfettered creativity he brings to the Custom Shop, Thorn also has impressive statistics. No prior Master Builder has come into the ranks from outside Fender since the inception of the institution at the hands of co-founding Master Builder Mike Stevens. Plus, to our knowledge, none has built as many guitars while an independent maker as Thorn did prior to his move to the Custom Shop (some 800 in total), while also maintaining a business as one of the world's most renowned inlay artists.

It would also be safe to say that none honed their chops making guitars that diverged so widely, even radically, from the traditional Fender formula. A 24-fret, set-neck double-cut with carved bookmatched top in flamed koa, multicoloured Koi inlaid into its ebony fingerboard, abalone purfling ringing its body, fingerboard and headstock and Brazilian-rosewood humbucker bobbin tops and knobs? Yes indeed.

But Thorn can also turn out a bolt-neck, single-cut, Cabronita-style twang monster in matte black with pinstriping and *Dia de los Muertos* graphics, and show just as much excitement in the process. Take that kind of artistry, put a Fender decal on it and inject it into the existing powerhouse that is the Custom Shop, and the sky's the limit.

It's also worth noting that Ron Thorn is one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet, anywhere, in any walk of life and has a deep, easy, enthusiastic laugh that bubbles forth whenever the subject really tickles his fancy. Make of that what you will, but the world could definitely use a lot more of it.

O CANADA!

Asked how it feels to have a bench in such hallowed ground in the guitar world on the near-anniversary

“IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT JOB THEY HAVE, THERE ARE REALLY GOOD PLAYERS HERE. THEY’RE SO PROUD TO BE WORKING ON FENDERS – AND I’M RIGHT THERE WITH THEM”

ABOVE The headstock of the exquisite Ron Thorn Masterbuilt Thinline Telecaster featured on p80

OPPOSITE Ron Thorn’s signature is a mark of the finest Custom Shop quality

of his first year with the Custom Shop, Ron Thorn simply says: “It’s amazing! And just the sheer comradery – most guys here play guitar, so they’re just nerded out. It doesn’t matter what job they have, they can be sanders, fret installers, there are some really good players here and they’re so proud to be working on Fenders. And I’m right there with them. It’s a great product, and everybody’s thrilled by it.”

It was a long road to get there, though, and the trek began north of the border. Born in Brampton, Ontario, Canada – “in the summer of ’69, the week before Woodstock” – the young Thorn was immersed in both music and woodworking practically before he could walk. “My brother is 10 years older,” he tells us, “so all throughout the 70s, say, I’m six and he’s 16, so you can imagine the musical influences he was bombarding me with: Zeppelin, Rush, Max Webster, Queen. I was just hit with all the good music at an early age, which certainly helped shape my future.”

Thorn’s grandfather and two of his uncles were finish carpenters by trade and his father, an armourer for the Royal Canadian Navy, was skilled enough in the craft to maintain a comprehensive wood shop in the garage of the family home, in which he constructed all of the furniture in the house.

As Thorn puts it: “I didn’t realise that wasn’t the norm until taking woods and metals in junior high. I went in there knowing how to operate every piece of machinery and my friends are just on the brink of cutting their thumbs off. I didn’t realise that, ‘Oh, you all don’t have wood shops in your garage? That’s peculiar!’”

In 1979, Thorn senior accepted a new job in Burbank, California and took the family with him, and it was there on the West Coast where the revolution in electric-guitar design had first been televised three decades before that junior really started putting the wood, the metal and the music together. At the age of 13, a friend from junior high gave him the neck and tuners from an imported Japanese Prestige model guitar from the 60s and within a week, he and his dad had built a body and he had fabricated a pickguard and a string-through bridge in metals class. The electronics, though, would have to be sourced elsewhere.

DO YOU WANT TO SOUND LIKE HIM?

“This was 1982,” says Thorn, “and Van Halen’s at their peak. And I specifically recall walking to Killeen Music in Burbank, where I told the guy: ‘I need a pickup.’ He asked what kind of guitar it was for, and I told him it was home-made, so it didn’t really matter. And he points to the picture of Eddie Van Halen on my ’81 tour jersey and says: ‘Do you want to sound like him?’ as he slides the Duncan humbucker across the counter top. I was just like [affects a meek ‘caught-out’ voice], ‘Yeeeesssss…’ I grabbed it and my feet never touched the ground on the way home, to get that thing whacked in there and wired up.”

And so it began. Thorn worked his way up from that first DIY job to modifying the Ibanezes and other guitars popular with kids back in the day, and quickly became the go-to guy in high school for repairs, modifications, installations of locking Floyd Rose and Kahler vibratos, and the rest of it. “Lots of humbuckers slammed into Strats,” he recalls. “That whole routine.”

After studying mechanical engineering, he took a job as engineering manager for a custom machinery company in Southern California, where he learned how to program and operate CNC machine tools. Meanwhile, in the evenings, he was building guitars at home in his dad’s shop. And this was when the desire took hold to add a little more artistry to craft.

THE INLAY GUY

“I wanted to take it a little further and do some inlay work,” Thorn says, “and I built this neck-through guitar and decided I wanted to do a Chinese dragon inlay on it. So I bought all the supplies and stuff from Stew-Mac, and bought some sterling silver from the jewellery district in LA, and every day after work would just spend a few hours hand-cutting these scales and inlaying this dragon. It took months and

months and after it was completed, I took the entire guitar to G&W Guitarworks. They used to run a little ad in *The Recycler* mag that said: 'We Paint Guitars!'

"I laid it on the counter, and Lee Garver looked at it and said: 'Who did the inlay work?' I said: 'I did. And I built the whole thing from scratch.' Two hours later, I left with a dozen necks and fretboards under my arm to inlay, just like that. I suddenly had a side gig doing inlay work.

"Because there were very few people in the country that did it, let alone in Southern California, so word got out quick. Next thing I know, I'm doing stuff for Ibanez Custom Shop, Schecter Custom Shop, anybody local. Yamaha has a custom shop here, ESP, all the small little local custom shops. And then around '95 or '96, I got my foot in the door at the Fender Custom Shop and that was a huge career change."

Indeed. For more than two decades, Thorn, with frequent assistance from his dad, who'd recently retired, did *all* of the Fender Custom Shop's custom inlay work. The effort, along with the rest of the inlay jobs coming in, necessitated him leaving his erstwhile 'day job' to take up inlay work full-time in 1999.

A year later, he officially launched Thorn Guitars, with his own logo and all, and soon the full builds came along at a pace to rival the inlay commissions.

FROM EXOTICS TO BOLT NECKS

As the predominant style of his early builds might indicate, Thorn initially got a lot of his custom-guitar commissions from players spinning off the popularity of Paul Reed Smith. "It took off quick via the PRS Forum, and then it segued into The Gear Page," he recalls. "Because my initial guitars were very PRS-like in terms of being double-cut carved tops, lots of inlay. I'm not even sure if the [PRS] Private Stock program was around at that time, or if it was it was very early and it gave a lot of guys the opportunity to have something similar, yet fully custom. And that was *hot* back then, too. Lots of inlay, and lots of exotic woods. And I was doing wood P-90 covers and wood bobbins, lots of details that either hadn't been done or were very rare to see."

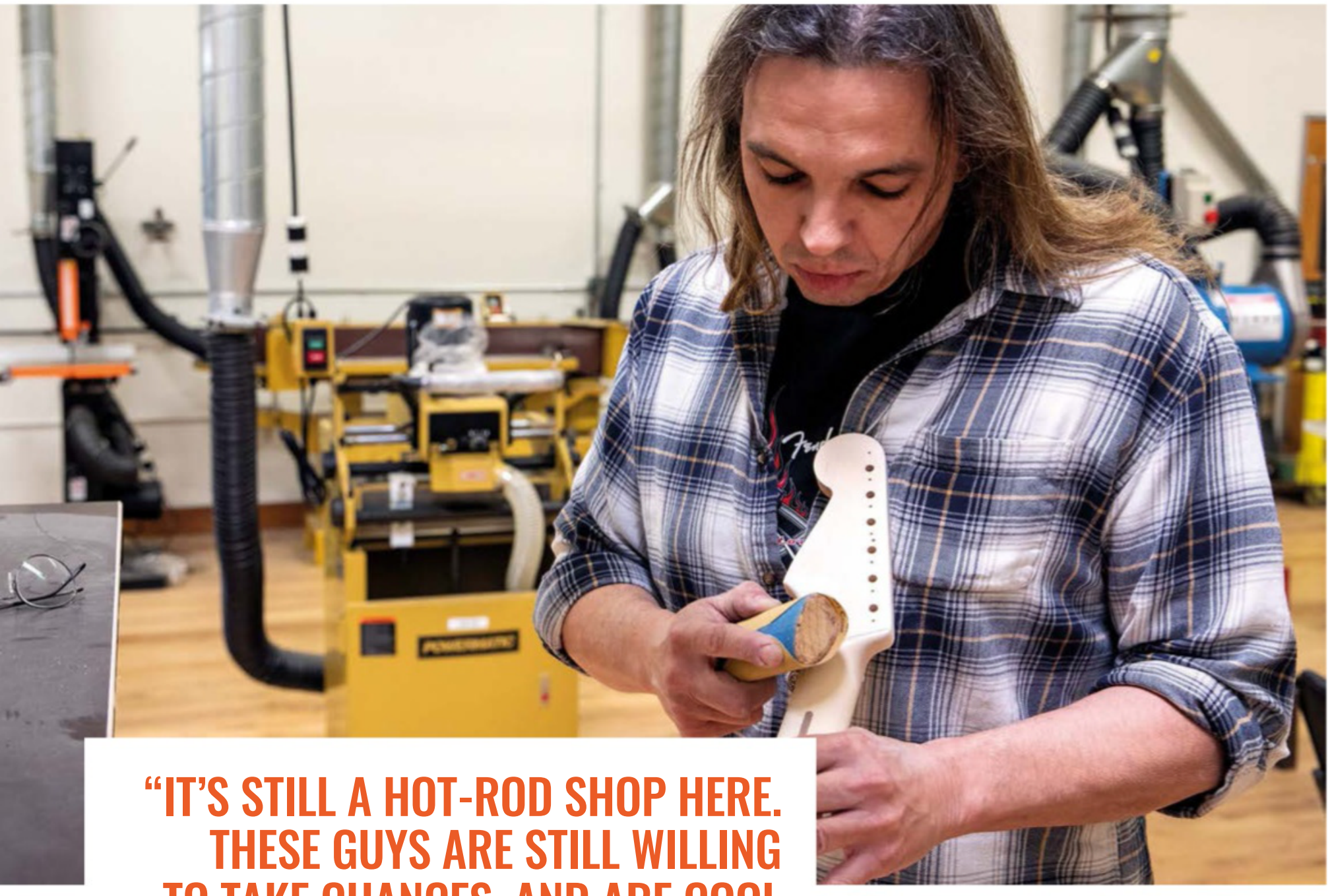
Such popularity can be perilous for a small shop, though, and the time came when Thorn just couldn't keep up. In 2009, he took stock and found himself back-ordered for 140 of his Artisan Master guitars; maintaining the status quo simply wasn't feasible. "Every one of those on order was extremely custom," Thorn says, "and the lead time became unpredictable. 'Five years? 10 years? I don't even know, buddy!' There was just no way to predict how long it would take. 'You're guitar number 141 now, and guitar 137 has a huge aquarium inlay theme, so…'"

The solution was the launch of his SoCal line, which allowed Thorn to keep building new guitars, and stay sane while still hammering away at the pre-ordered Artisans. Rendered in four body styles, including Telecaster, Stratocaster, and super-Strat-like shapes plus his own original offset California Special design, the SoCals were overtly more Fender-inspired, in a range of single coil and humbucker-loaded configurations. They were built with bolt-neck construction, albeit with Thorn's own highly engineered 'Precision Lock' custom dovetail lap neck joint.

"There were no elaborate custom inlays," says Ron, "and they were essentially easier instruments to build in that they're not carve tops and there wasn't a whole lot of custom implementation. But, as you can see if you look at the gallery, they started fairly traditional, and of course [laughs] they start getting a little more 'out there' and a little more elaborate."

FENDER CALLING

If it was at first daunting making the move from being his own boss and building whatever style of guitar he felt like, to being part of a world-striding guitar powerhouse that mainly pushed out a limited selection of core models, Thorn has nonetheless been able to fully express himself creatively within the Fender fold. Even beyond that, fans of his previous work should be delighted by the extent to



"IT'S STILL A HOT-ROD SHOP HERE. THESE GUYS ARE STILL WILLING TO TAKE CHANCES, AND ARE COOL ABOUT IT. EVERYBODY'S A PLAYER. NO ONE WEARS A TIE HERE"

ABOVE From intricate inlays to new body shapes, there's very little the Fender Custom Shop's Principal Master Builder hasn't turned his hand to during his career

which Fender has embraced several of Thorn's bold signature moves.

"I was afraid that, 'Oh boy, here we go. I'm going to be building '52 Teles and '65 Strats for the rest of my life!'" Thorn tells us. "But no, that couldn't be further from the truth. Let's put it this way: no one has said 'don't do that' to me yet."

More to the point, the Custom Shop's open-armed reception of Thorn's skill and ethos seems to have taken very much a '*do* do that' line. From programming Fender's CNCs, to developing new tooling, to introducing an entirely new vibrato design to the Fender catalogue (the VibraDyne, paired with Thorn's own Brass Knuckle bridge design), to building the first new Coronados made in the USA since the early 80s, to entirely revamping almost every aspect of the fretting shop, Thorn has already played a major role in the works above and beyond the guitars he himself has created as Principal Master Builder. And even there, a major dose of Thorn continues to shine through beneath the iconic Fender logo.

Take, for example, the sly introduction of his own California Special as one of the first new Fender body shapes in aeons to join the iconic lineup of Telecaster, Stratocaster, Jazzmaster and Mustang. Thorn takes up the tale…

"Here's the truth. We got an email in June or July, saying: 'The NAMM Show's coming up, start working on your NAMM Show stuff! The space allotment's approximately a half-dozen guitars, so build whatever you want, and make them Fenders.' That's how it read, period. So I'm just, 'I'm doin' it, and if I get in trouble, so be it!' I ran the bodies myself on the CNC in the wee hours. I was assembling it on my bench when my director, Chris Fleming, comes in and goes: 'What's that?'

"And I kind of felt caught. My face got red a little bit, but man, it's painted, I'm putting it together, and I just said: 'It's called the California Special.' And he just looks at me and goes: 'Huh. How'd you do that?' and walked away.

"And I was kinda like, 'I guess it's going to the show. I guess it's good to go!' We took orders for them and I was answering questions from the sales guys, so I was like, 'Okay, it's in the mix now!' So, it's a model that can only be ordered Master Built through me as a builder, for now, though it'd be fine with me if any of the other guys wanted to do them."

Fender is a big corporation, but so far, Ron Thorn has not found the typical attitude we associate with such levels of business to be reflected at all in the work going on in the trenches.

Or, as he puts it: "It's still a hot-rod shop here. These guys are still willing to take chances, and are digging it, and are cool about it. Everybody's a player. No one wears a tie here." G

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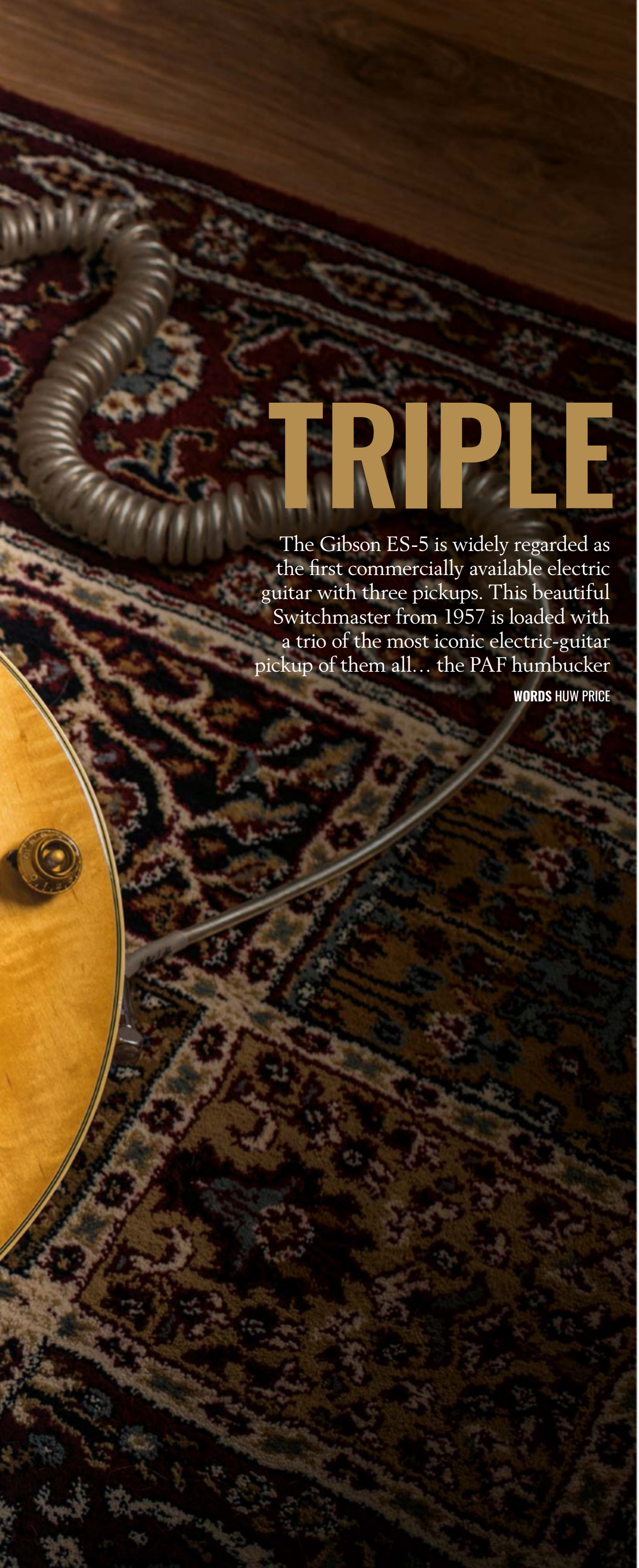


VINTAGE BENCH TEST

TRIPLE THREAT

The Gibson ES-5 is widely regarded as the first commercially available electric guitar with three pickups. This beautiful Switchmaster from 1957 is loaded with a trio of the most iconic electric-guitar pickup of them all… the PAF humbucker

WORDS HUW PRICE

By the 1950s, Gibson's reputation as a jazz-guitar manufacturer was founded on traditional lutherie skills and understated style. But when the mood took it, the company could certainly bling it out with anybody – Gretsch and Epiphone included.

This ES-5 Switchmaster is a prime example, with gold hardware, fancy multi-ply fingerboard binding and no less than six knobs to go with three original PAF humbuckers. The 'Switchmaster' name comes from the four-way switch mounted on the Venetian cutaway with an accompanying plate engraved to denote settings for each individual pickup, or 'all' three.

THREE'S A CROWD

The ES-5 model was introduced in 1949 with a rosewood bridge, a gold-plated version of the ES-175 parallelogram tailpiece and three P-90 pickups. The triple-pickup complement is considered an industry first and pre-dates the Epiphone Zephyr Emperor Regent by a year.

Some players found having three individual volume controls and a master tone mounted on the cutaway somewhat impractical. So, the Switchmaster specs were introduced in 1955, along with a gold-plated ABR-1 bridge on a rosewood base. The double-loop tailpiece followed in 1956 and by 1957, state-of-the-art PAF humbuckers had replaced P-90 single-coils.

In 1961, a Florentine cutaway was introduced and cherry sunburst became the standard finish before the model was discontinued the following year. While the Switchmaster might easily fall into the jazzbox category, it wasn't such a hit with jazz players. That's fine because plenty of blues, country and rockabilly players love them.

It's pretty obvious why jazz guitarists weren't enamoured with the Switchmaster – their baffling preference for playing music rather than perpetually fiddling about with gear means that few jazz players bother switching pickups.

This example from ATB Guitars in Cheltenham, UK is in stunning condition, with no discernible play wear on the body or neck. There is a small lacquer chip deep inside the cutaway and another near the

ABOVE Although there's a familiar Telecaster-style tip, this is a four-position switch that offers individual pickup settings and a combination of all three

OPPOSITE TOP The end of the fingerboard has the peaked shape reserved for Gibson's fanciest jazz boxes and the neck pickup's gold plating is quite worn

OPPOSITE RIGHT The engraved model name on the tailpiece has a quirky period charm

tailpiece, but they're barely noticeable. The finish does have some very fine checking, but overall, it's near mint. The gold plating has worn away from the outer edges of the pickup covers and the top of the tailpiece, but the fingerboard and frets appear almost unplayed.

A retainer wire reveals the Tune-o-matic here is old, but a later replacement. The case is slightly later, too, but it fits the guitar perfectly and marks in the orange velour demonstrate that the Switchmaster is the only guitar ever to have lived inside.

Switchmasters are considerably more upmarket than ES-175s. Although laminated, Gibson tended to use more figured maple, and both the body and neck have five-ply binding. Single-ply binding adorns the headstock and f-holes, with genuine pearl marker blocks along the light Brazilian rosewood.

The neck is a laminated construction with a thin rosewood centre strip flanked by two pieces of maple. Headstock 'ears' are added but you can only tell by looking at the end of the headstock because the rear is sprayed black.

A 'stinger' gracefully transitions into the centre strip with a precision that, back in the late 1950s, the Gretsch factory could only have dreamed of.

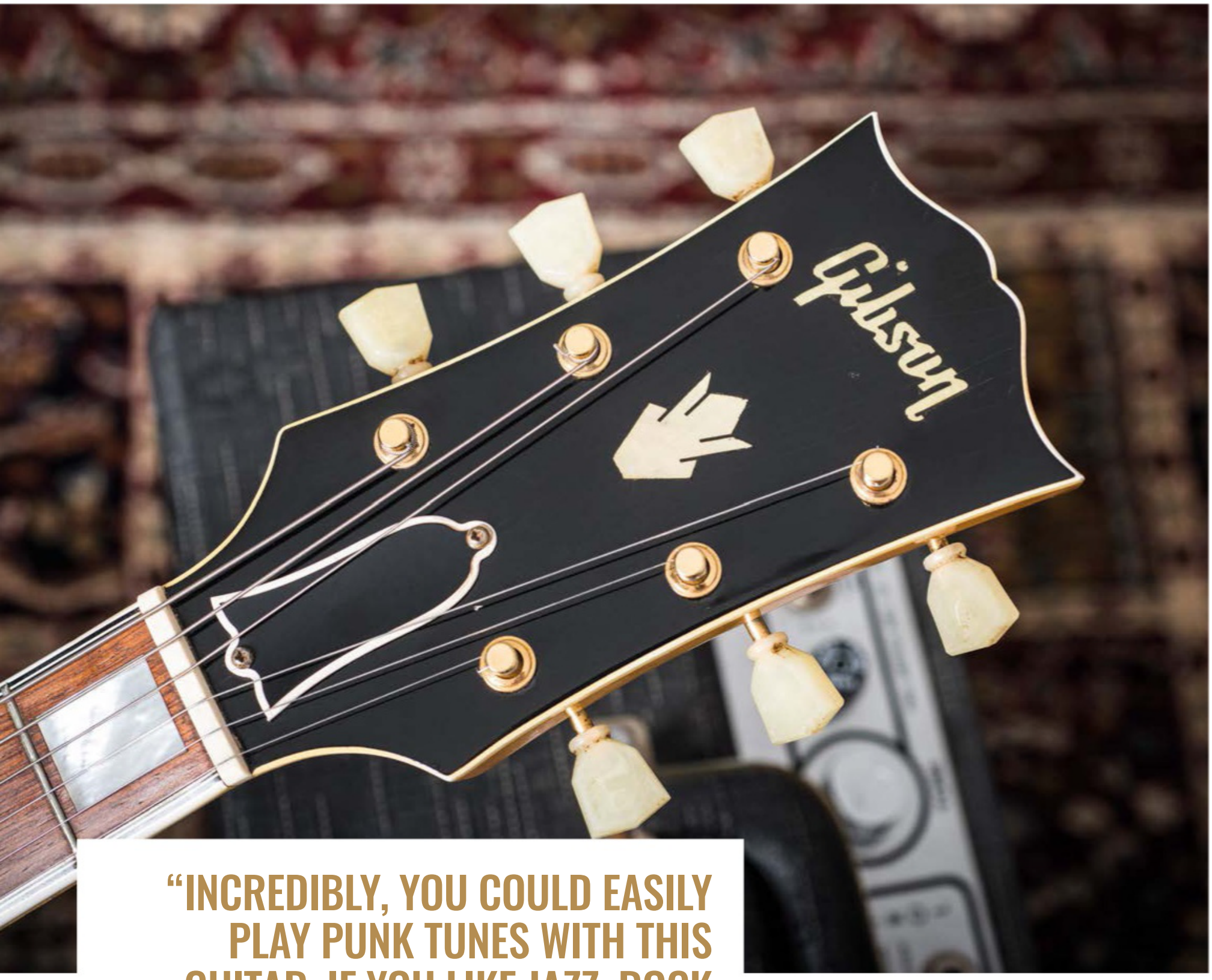
KEY FEATURES

PRICE £14,995
DESCRIPTION Hollowbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
BUILD Maple ply body with maple/rosewood/maple laminate neck, bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, 20 frets
HARDWARE Kluson 'waffle back' tuners, Tune-o-matic bridge on floating rosewood base, double-loop tailpiece
ELECTRICS 3x PAF humbucking pickups, 3x volume, 3x tone, 4-way switch
FINISH Blonde nitrocellulose
SCALE LENGTH 643mm/25.3"
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.5mm at first fret, 25mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 33.7mm at nut, 50.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.44kg/7.58lb
CONTACT ATB Guitars atbguitars.com

IN USE

Beginning unplugged, the Switchmaster has a glorious tone. It's reasonably loud for a laminate construction, the treble is mellow but clear and the bass resonates deep inside the body. There's also a considerable thump to the low mids and impressive sustain. Yet while the Switchmaster ticks all the boxes for definition, body, sustain and balance, there is something that some players may find hard to live with…

This guitar's defining feature may also be its most divisive. Depending on your picking-hand



“INCREDIBLY, YOU COULD EASILY PLAY PUNK TUNES WITH THIS GUITAR. IF YOU LIKE JAZZ, ROCK ’N’ ROLL AND JUMP BLUES, THE SWITCHMASTER HAS IT COVERED”

ABOVE Given the extravagance on display elsewhere, the bound headstock and crown inlay have a restrained elegance

RIGHT Gibson’s high-end jazz guitars often featured ‘waffle back’ Kluson tuners and this black ‘stinger’ motif

technique, the middle pickup can get in the way. It would probably be noticeable enough with P-90s, but humbuckers with plastic rings are even bigger. There’s a sizeable gap between Strat pickups, but these PAFs are barely 20mm apart. Also, the pickups are so microphonic – as they should be – that with the middle pickup selected, every time a plectrum or thumb pick touches the cover, a loud thump comes through the speaker.

Do the added tonal options make up for having to adjust your playing approach? Much depends on how you quantify tonal qualities. On the one hand, you might find the individual and combined tones all have merit, or you may consider them such close variations on a theme that it’s not worth the extra complication or obstruction.

All that said, we’re determined to give this guitar a chance to sing, so we spend a very worthwhile 10 minutes or so adjusting the pickup heights to balance

them out and coax out their best qualities. We also discover that in doing so, each individual tone becomes more characterful.

The middle pickup does the best job of capturing the Switchmaster's acoustic tone, with the correct bass and treble balance and a wiry, yet slightly hollow, snarl through the midrange. The neck setting is no less clear, but it fattens and refines the tone to a more fluid and vocal sweetness.

Meanwhile, the bridge pickup's quacky chime and woody twang are almost guaranteed to outrage members of the Jazz Research Group. We can't resist the temptation to add some overdrive. Incredibly, you could easily play a set of punk tunes with this guitar. If you like jazz, blues, 50s style rock 'n' roll and jump blues, the Switchmaster has it all covered.

After a while it occurs to us that it may be possible to position the switch between the individual pickup settings – Stratocaster style – and discover it can indeed be done. Placing the switch between the bridge and middle positions should be the same as selecting 'all' with the neck volume set to zero. But as it turns out, the in between setting is brighter, spankier and bizarrely Stratty. Although the pickups aren't out of phase, it's not unlike a T-Bone Walker or Peter Green tone – and it might be our favourite Switchmaster sound. You can also use the switch to combine the neck and middle pickups for a similar tone with extra body.

"THE NECK IS FAIRLY ROUNDED AND CHUNKY, EVEN BY MID-50S GIBSON STANDARDS, BUT WE LOVE IT, AND THE PLAYABILITY AND TUNING STABILITY CANNOT BE FAULTED"

Further investigation reveals that it's the same for all the individual pickups, so the 'all' setting must introduce a subtle degree of treble bleed.

Using the switch itself feels more like shifting a gearstick. We find it quirky in a cool sort of way and it's easy enough to handle. The neck is fairly rounded and chunky, even by mid-50s Gibson standards, but we love it, and the playability and tuning stability cannot be faulted.

Before long, we even manage to cope with the pickup spacing and if you select 'all' then turn off the middle-pickup volume control, it's a fabulous tone for Chet picking and you won't hear any unwanted noises. This really is a beautiful and fascinating instrument.

ABOVE TOP RIGHT Jazzbox geometry means that all the pickup rings have different heights and the bridge pickup ring is the rarest of all the M69s

ABOVE RIGHT A pale Brazilian rosewood fingerboard contrasts with five-ply binding and this guitar retains its original nibbed frets

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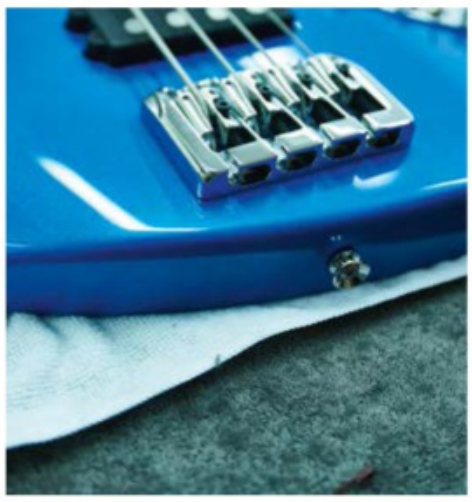

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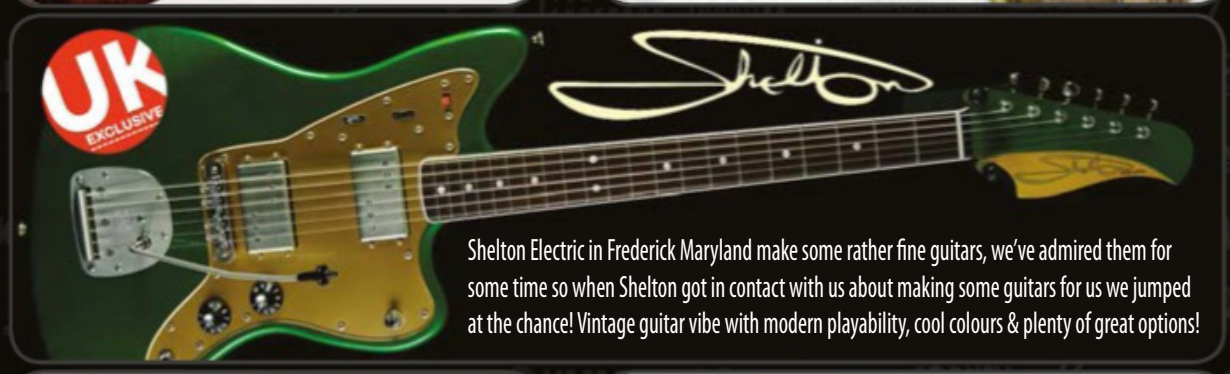

Shelton Electric in Frederick Maryland make some rather fine guitars, we've admired them for some time so when Shelton got in contact with us about making some guitars for us we jumped at the chance! Vintage guitar vibe with modern playability, cool colours & plenty of great options!

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MARTIN
D-28 MODERN DELUXE

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Martin's Modern Deluxe series seamlessly combines the classic with the cutting edge. Can an industry standard be reinvented?

Although the Modern Deluxe edition of the evergreen D-28 dreadnought is packed with modern features and innovations, Martin isn't exactly flaunting them. At first glance, this guitar looks much like any other high-end D-28, and its special attributes only become apparent on much closer examination.

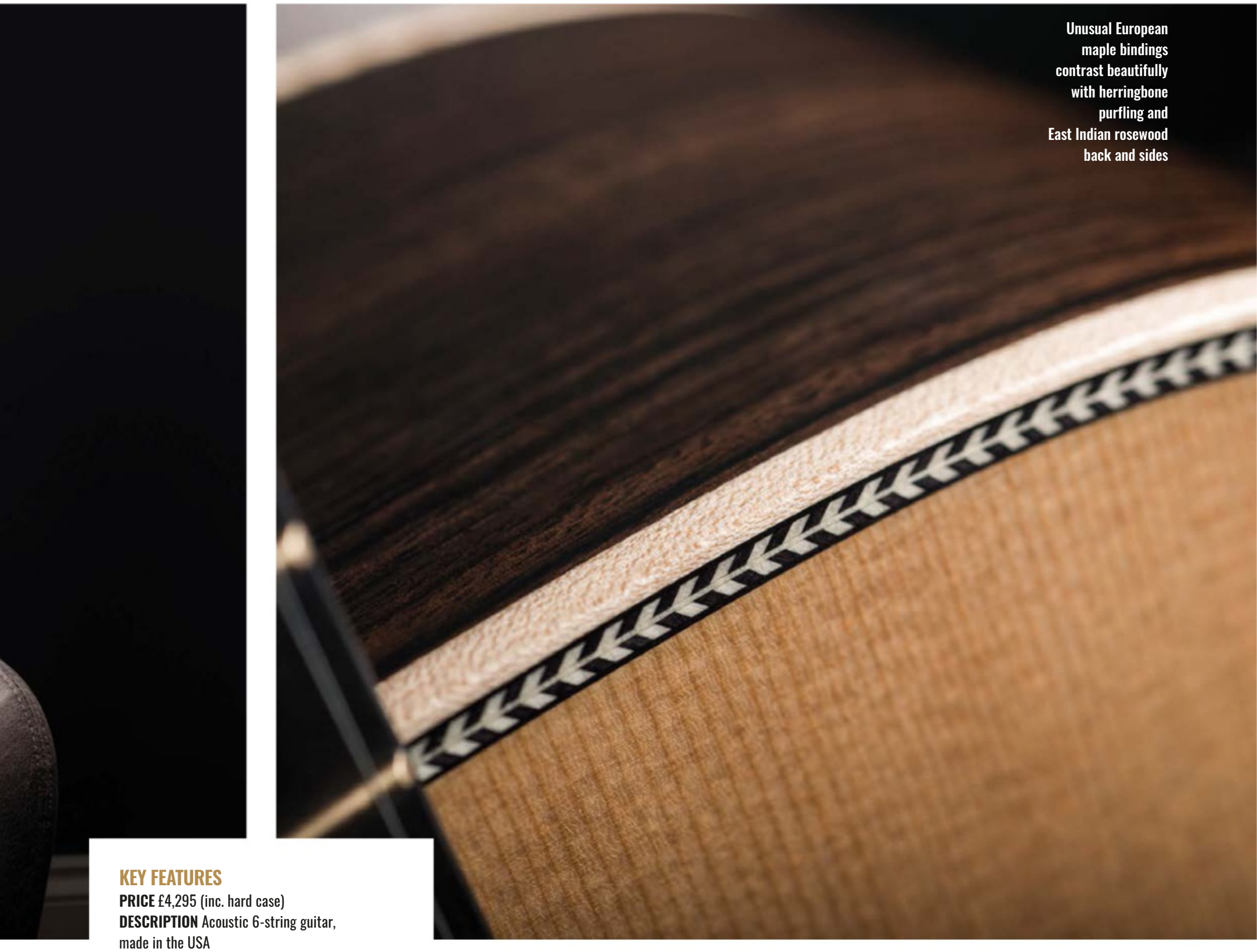
Let's begin with the more obvious. This is almost certainly the first Martin this writer has seen with wood bindings, in this case flamey European maple that looks fantastic against the herringbone purfling and the darker East Indian rosewood back and sides. On the headstock, Martin logos generally take two forms: gold script decals and elaborate pearl inlays. Here, however, we get a combination, because the 1930s-style script logo is actually an abalone inlay.

There's also something unusual about the bridge pins with their recessed red dots. They're described as Liquidmetal, which is a non-crystalline material that can be injection moulded. This means the pins are cheaper to manufacture than machined metal pins, but they provide a claimed 4dB increase in volume compared to plastic, wood and bone pins.

Martin's VTS (Vintage Tone System) tops are torrefied, but there's a reason the Sitka spruce here retains its paler natural look. Martin's research suggests that most torrefied acoustic tops are closer in moisture content and cellular structure to spruce that's over a century old. Since the period immediately preceding WWII is considered the finest for vintage Martin tone, the company decided that in some instances, regular roasting goes a bit too far.

Instead, the M1 system was developed to create 'aged' tops that are closer to those that are 70 or 80 years old. If you want even 'older' sounding and darker looking soundboards, then Martin's M2 tops are the ones for you.

Aside from superb build quality and playability, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Modern Deluxe D-28 is the way it combines traditional building methods with cutting-edge materials. For instance, 'natural protein glue' is an innocuous term for fish glue, and a dovetail neck join combines with pre-war style forward-shifted scalloped bracing. These are juxtaposed with an ultra-light, super-strong carbon-fibre bridgeplate and a titanium truss rod that's 45 per cent lighter than an equivalent steel truss rod. From the 1920s until 1934, Martin used ebony



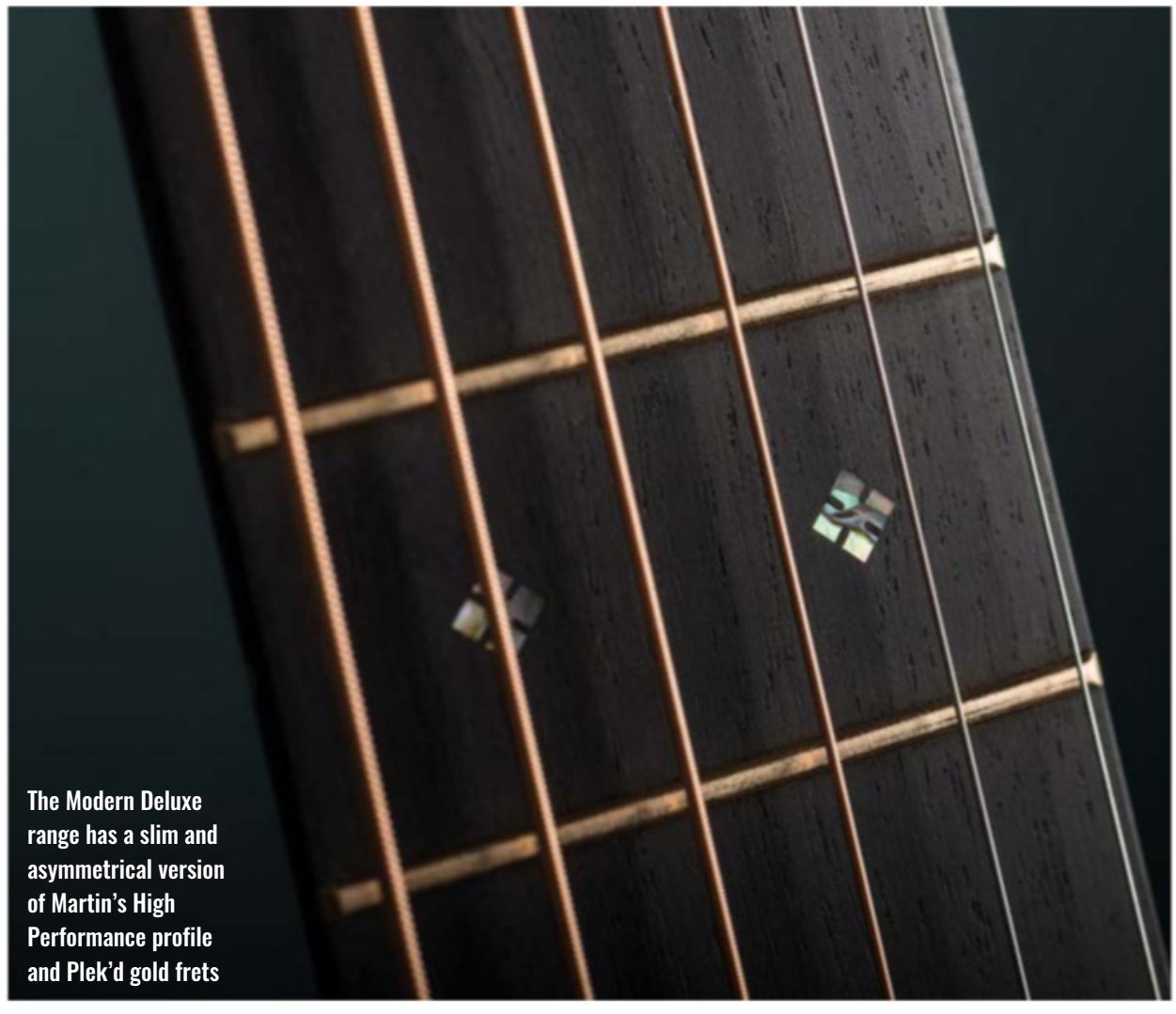
Unusual European maple bindings contrast beautifully with herringbone purfling and East Indian rosewood back and sides

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £4,295 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Acoustic 6-string guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Torrefied Sitka spruce top with forward-shifted and scalloped Adirondak spruce bracing, solid rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck with High Performance Taper profile, ebony bridge and fingerboard, rosewood peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, gold-plated Waverly open-gear tuners, bone nut and compensated saddle, Liquidmetal bridge pins, herringbone purfling, multi-stripe rosette, flame-maple body binding, titanium truss rod
SCALE LENGTH 645mm/25.4"
NECK WIDTH 44.8mm at nut, 54.2mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 19mm at 1st fret, 21mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 38.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.9kg/4.2lb
ELECTRONICS Optional
LEFT HANDERS Yes
FINISH Nitrocellulose gloss body, satin neck
CONTACT Westside Distribution
westsidedistribution.com, martinguitar.com

strips to reinforce necks. T-bar rods lasted until the war, when ebony and T-bars were used interchangeably depending upon the availability of steel.

The point is that low-mass necks were a feature on many great vintage Martins



The Modern Deluxe range has a slim and asymmetrical version of Martin's High Performance profile and Plek'd gold frets

The headstock outline is classic Martin, while the 1930s-style script logo is inlaid abalone

and the company has recently been using carbon-fibre neck-reinforcement strips in some historically inspired models for this very reason. Adjustable titanium rods could offer the best of both worlds.

The satin-finished mahogany neck is far from traditional, with a slim and asymmetrical version of Martin's High Performance profile that's exclusive to the Modern Deluxe series. Plek'd gold frets match the open-gear Waverly tuners, which combine classic looks with stellar performance. The Waverlys are incredibly smooth and accurate and you'd struggle to find anything superior.

IN USE

This D-28 arrives with us at the same time as a fairly recent D-45 that's here for some minor set-up work. With both guitars sporting fresh string sets – Martin Authentic Acoustics and D'Addario Phosphor Bronze 0.012s – we have a chance to compare like with like… or not, as the case may be.

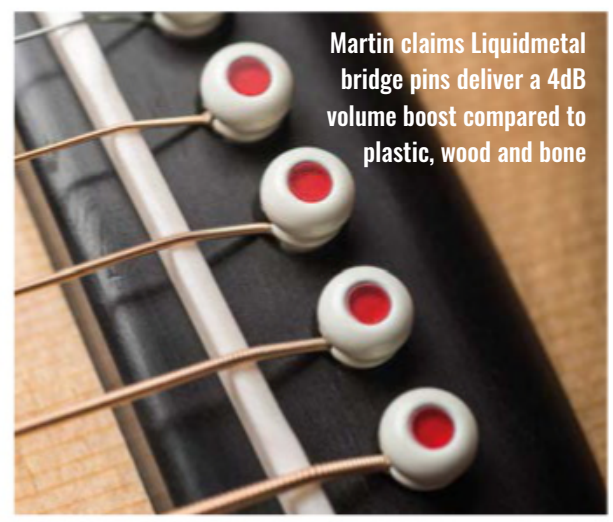
The D-28 sounds louder and is quicker to respond. The treble response is about the same, but there are noticeable differences in the bass and midrange. The D-45 produces a deeper thump, although the D-28 certainly isn't lacking in low end.

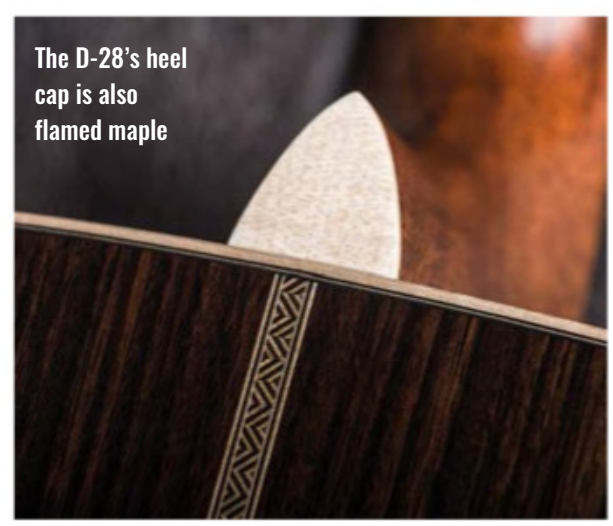
The midrange characteristics demonstrate the real contrast, with the D-45 having that classic scoop where the fourth and third (D and G) strings sit back a little. The D-28, however, is far more balanced across the strings; its mids have more presence and punch, and low notes have a crisper attack. It's still recognisably a Martin dreadnought tone, but to label it as 'updated' or 'modernised' would be oversimplifying matters. There's something more considered and interesting going on here.

With this Modern Deluxe D-28, Martin has managed to bolster the mids and even out the string-to-string response – in a way that seems quite in vogue – without losing what we like about the company's traditional dreadnought sonic signature. It's not excessively bright, the bass is effectively de-boomed without sacrificing power and the sustain is remarkable.

Although the D-45 provides a warmer and mellower playing experience, it doesn't mean it sounds more vintage. We've come to associate vintage Martins with airy and ethereal chime, and of these two dreadnoughts, the D-28 comes closest to that. The downside is that plain strings can sound a touch thin, but in the case of this D-28, they have real substance. The D-28 also has a greater tonal range than its stablemate. It's that 'three pickups' thing we look for when we move a plectrum from the area in front of the bridge to the edge of the soundhole and onto the end of the fingerboard. We hear three very distinct sounds and also find that the D-28 has a greater dynamic range. It will respond to a gentle touch almost as well as it does to a heavy right hand.

Where the D-45 reveals its sonic charms in a subtler and more gradual way, the Modern Deluxe D-28 exhibits its purpose immediately – to combine time-honoured Martin tone with the midrange balance and livelier response that many contemporary players prefer. Impressive stuff. G


Martin claims Liquidmetal bridge pins deliver a 4dB volume boost compared to plastic, wood and bone


The D-28's heel cap is also flamed maple

9/10 **A top-drawer dreadnought that's both contemporary and timeless**

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ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN
JOHN PETRUCCI MAJESTY

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Music Man's Majesty model has always been built for speed, but 2019's limited-edition Tiger Eye model offers progressive metal players a ride with unprecedented luxury. Time to rev up this magnificent seven…

Introduced in 2014 – in addition to the long-running and much vaunted JP series – the Majesty entered its fifth year of production with tweaked range for 2019, including new DiMarzio signature pickups and new finishes. Conceived out of Dream Theater mainman John Petrucci's desire to include a neck-through guitar in his arsenal, rather than tweak the tried, tested and successful formula of the long-standing JP signature, a completely new design emerged – one that was ergonomic, balanced, and sonically versatile.

Though not yet quite as ubiquitous on the prog-metal scene as the JP series, the Majesty seems to be in John's hands more than ever, and apparently what we'll refer to as the 'Tiger Eye' model reviewed here was used extensively on the new Dream Theater album, *Distance Over Time*.

The Tiger Eye is the flagship of the 2019 Majesty range. Limited to a run of just 300 and available in both six- and seven-string versions, it's the only Majesty in the range to feature a maple top, flamed maple neck and an alder body. The other Majestys have either a mahogany or basswood body and are priced at around two thirds of the cost of the review model.

Over time, the Majesty's ongoing development has yielded much improvement to its appearance. When first introduced, its finish was designed to exude a race-car vibe – appropriate for the high-octane speed-picking pioneer it was designed for – with two-tone colouring and a maple 'shield' intended to mimic a sheet of carbon fibre. However, with its stark ergonomics, extended and protruding upper horn, the finishes accentuated unusual aspects of the design and perhaps diminished its potential to appeal to a more conservative audience. The 2019 models have dropped the two-tone colours in favour of new, more conventional finishes.

The figured maple on the body and headstock here imports a genuine elegance. Flip the guitar over and the theme continues with a three-piece neck with mahogany sides and a strip of matching flamed maple through the middle. Again, it's elegant and eye-catching and the gloss black sides give the impression of a sunburst finish, mirroring the body. The through-neck is seamless and the recessed neck heel has been designed to offer unencumbered access to all 24 frets.

The Tiger Eye has DiMarzio Rainmaker and Dreamcatcher magnetic humbuckers, plus a piezo pickup

There are plenty of tonal options, including a coil split and an active 20dB boost

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £5,949 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
OPTIONS 6-string version is £5,699
CONTACT Strings And Things
stringsandthings.co.uk, music-man.com

HARDWARE Chrome-plated, hardened steel Custom John Petrucci Music Man floating vibrato bridge with solid steel saddles, Schaller M6-IND locking tuners

WEIGHT 3.3kg/7.27lb

BUILD Alder wings with maple body cap, mahogany and flame-maple through-neck, ebony fretboard with 17-inch radius, 24 medium-jumbo stainless-steel frets

ELECTRONICS DiMarzio Rainmaker (neck) and Dreamcatcher (bridge) magnetic humbuckers, piezo bridge pickup, 3-way toggle pickup selector with custom centre-position configuration; 3-way toggle piezo/magnetic selector, momentary mono/stereo output knob (piezo volume). Custom Music Man active preamp; push/push volume for gain boost, 500k-ohm push/push passive tone for custom two-pickup configurations, .022µF tone capacitor

FINISH Tiger Eye high-gloss polyester (limited to 300 models worldwide)

Many cavities are required to house the complex configuration of electronics, which include a piezo bridge and onboard preamp. There are three aluminium control plates at the rear which, despite the guitar's weighty price tag, aren't recessed. Yet even with all the electronic gadgetry on board, the guitar remains both light and perfectly balanced.

HANDS ON

After spending some time putting it through its paces, the flat radius and slim neck prove to be very supportive of all hand positions, not just the thumb-behind-the-neck with which technical players are so often associated. Regardless of depth measurements, the wonderfully rolled fretboard and supporting shoulders of the neck ensure that the underside of your first finger and thumb are guaranteed a comfortable surface. Once again, we've yet to play a Music Man that doesn't have a fabulous neck.

The ebony fingerboard is perfectly smooth and naturally finished and while a 17-inch radius implies a flatter-than-average surface, there's a noticeable curvature – which takes very little getting used to, even if you're more accustomed to a rounder radius. The neck isn't as wide as you may fear if you're approaching from a six-string-only background and wrapping your thumb around the neck for bends, or even chord shapes that utilise the thumb, is a cinch.

While the concept of ergonomics can mean different things to different guitarists – and traditionalists would argue there are few guitars physically comfortable that a Strat – a great deal of thought has been given both to the contouring of the body and the layout of the controls.

The neck heel delivers on its promise, and although only when sitting or wearing the guitar up high are you able to shred away comfortably around the 21st to 24th fret area of the seventh and sixth (low B and E) string, this is hardly the business end of *any* guitar!

The myriad switches are easily accessible and don't distract from actual playing. With a simple flick of the wrist, an active preamp with 20dB boost can be activated via the push-push volume control, providing a perfect volume hike for solos, and a coil-split facility is activated by pushing the tone control when the pickup selector is in the middle position.

Only when speed-picking away effortlessly (although not to Petrucci's remarkable standard, of course) did we realise that there was a reason for our newfound agility. The forearm contour has been angled perfectly to deliver optimum support, thus providing freedom for the wrist to pendulate at speeds that your practice routine permits. It's quite something to notice an immediate improvement to this technique without actually putting in any further practice – if only it was always this way!

Sourcing a seven-string guitar that doesn't have either a fixed bridge or double-locking vibrato is a very difficult task. Vigier has designed its own and Hipshot is one of the very few companies offering an aftermarket

seven-string non-locking vibrato. But Music Man designed its own seven-string vibrato some years ago and it remains one of the most functional, expressive and reliable units on the market.

From adding shimmers to chordal work all the way to flat-out divebomb abuse, tuning will not be compromised. It's also recessed and unobtrusive, and the chrome plate makes for a comfortable surface for your right hand.

IN USE

When played unplugged, the Majesty proves to be a very resonant guitar – as you would expect from a through-neck instrument built from premium tonewoods, especially in this dizzying price bracket.

With two pickup selectors, piezo bridge, coil-split and volume-boost options, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the sonic variations on offer are mind boggling, but after consulting the manual briefly, activating each variant is sensible and entirely logical.

Music Man's traditional 4+2 configuration is a 5+2 here, but the Tiger Eye is also available as a six-string

The three-way selector on the upper horn works solely with the piezo, with position one activating the piezo only, position two the piezo and neck pickup together (which can be blended using the volume control and the piezo volume control situated bottom right) and position three, which turns it off completely. Further piezo tweaks can be made on the back of the guitar.

Piezo pickups have fans and detractors. Sure, this isn't a perfect emulation of an acoustic guitar – in this instance its rather bright and slightly synthetic sounding – but it's a close enough approximation for a live-band mix and therefore one less guitar you'll need to take to a gig. But regardless of whether you want to use it as a faux acoustic, it does offer up another interesting palette of sounds with which to decorate a song, especially when you begin blending in the magnetic neck pickup.

The 2019 Majesty sees the introduction of John's new Rainmaker and Dreamcatcher humbuckers. They're both very powerful, as you would expect, but feel less so than the DiMarzio Illuminators used in the JP series. Unsurprisingly, they pair very well with Boogies and other high-gain 6L6 amps – Petrucci's preference – and through a 5150 profile on an Axe-Fx III, the bridge pickup is hot but not oversaturating.

Palm-muted lower-register riffs have clarity and punch with a slightly scooped midrange and the alder wings afford some top-end bite that enables down-tuned riffs to really cut through.

In fact, alder is a somewhat underrated material for extended-range guitars, and the Majesty ably demonstrates this. A/B'd with our Vigier Excalibur seven-string, which itself has an alder body but with DiMarzio Blade pickups, there's remarkably little difference through beefy 5150 and Mesa-style patches on our Axe-Fx – but the Tiger Eye delivers a little more clarity in the bottom and top end.

The neck pickup is warm and voiced perfectly for those moody, bluesy rock shredding passages for which Petrucci is known, and the pick-attack noise on both pickups is remarkably quiet considering how they have been voiced. The boost is very clean and we can't detect it colouring the tone in any way. The coil split is slightly underwhelming by comparison, but entirely functional. Better clean sounds are to be found using the full humbucking settings and a rich, full-bodied tone is easily achieved with any 6L6-powered amplifier or model. Add a touch of chorus and a few open strings and you're immediately in John Petrucci clean territory.

Although the onboard electronics don't necessarily deliver tones that span a wide range of genres, there's no denying that this is one of the finest metal and hard-rock guitars we've played and, in this seven-string incarnation, it's a progressive-metal dream machine. Whether the guitar's construction and exclusivity justify the sizeable upcharge of a couple of grand on top of the already lofty price is debatable, but if you like your guitars as uncompromising as John Petrucci likes his music, this could be the one seven-string to rule them all. G

8/10 **The most magisterial Petrucci yet, with genre-defining playability and tones**

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Around the back, a number of cavities house the guitar's electronics and there are further tone-shaping controls

The three-piece neck has mahogany sides and beautifully flamed maple in the middle

The Tiger Eye is the only Majesty to offer a flamed maple top and neck and a body with alder wings

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TWO-ROCK
STUDIO SIGNATURE HEAD

WORDS HUW PRICE

If the big-bottle and big-iron sound is very much your thing, but a 100-watt power stage is too much, then check out this medium-sized solution from California…

With an emphasis on high-wattage Dumble-inspired designs, there's a sense Two-Rock has been kicking against the low-volume zeitgeist. Yet when we reviewed the Classic Reverb Signature in 2017, it was the most player-friendly 100-watter we've ever tried.

Even so, how many of us really need a 100-watt amplifier these days? Recognising this, Two-Rock introduced the Studio Pro 35 and that has now been facelifted and updated to create the Studio Signature. Two-Rock describe it as a lower power version of the Classic Reverb Signature, but it's downsized, more portable and produces 35 watts from a pair of 6L6 output valves.

The controls have been simplified, with custom-taper potentiometers and no push/pull switches. Instead, three frequency-boost switches are located on the front panel, right next to the three-band EQ. There's a presence control, too, along with gain and master and both the head and combo version (£2,899) have spring reverb.

On the rear panel, there's a reverb send control that sets the signal received by the spring tank. It's there to provide different decay times and tonal characteristics. Next to that is a three-way gain-structure switch (Blackface, Traditional Two-Rock, Schofield Signature), effects-loop connections and three speaker outputs for four, eight and 16 ohms. We pair the Studio Signature with a Two-Rock Black Bronco open-backed cabinet (£599) with a WGS 12-65 speaker – Warehouse's take on a Celestion G12-65.

IN USE

Two-Rock describes this as a versatile clean amplifier. The operative word here is 'clean' and as such, this amp may not conform to everybody's idea of versatility. Even so, the claim has some justification, because it offers a lot of scope for fine-tuning frequency response and dynamic feel within the context of a very high-end, medium-power pedal platform.

There's more to it, of course, because the Studio Signature is also capable of producing some classy overdriven tones, even if they might come at the expense of your hearing! In large part this is because the gain and master controls don't really operate in the way you might expect. The gain knob isn't a wide-ranging control that ranges from clean to crunchy and the master isn't intended merely to tame the

Both head and combo versions have excellent-sounding spring reverb

There's a trio of frequency-boost switches next to the three-band EQ

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,599
DESCRIPTION Single-channel valve head with reverb and valve buffered effects loop. Made in the USA
POWER RATING 35W
VALVES 4x 12AX7, 12AT7 (preamp), 2x 6L6 (power amp)
CONTROL PANEL Gain, bright/mid/deep boost switches, treble, middle, bass, reverb, master, presence, standby
REAR PANEL Reverb send, 3-way gain-structure switch, effects loop send and return, 4-, 8- and 16-ohm speaker outputs, power
DIMENSIONS 397 x 232 x 254mm
WEIGHT 11.8kg/26lb
CONTACT Coda Music
coda-music.com, two-rock.com

The gain structure features Blackface, Traditional Two-Rock and Matt Schofield Signature settings

beast. If you want this amp to overdrive, both have to be set fairly high and that means you're going to get blasted.

Let's begin by establishing how much clean headroom is available. The gain-structure switch is set in the up position to select Two-Rock's 'traditional' front end, the master is maxed out and we slowly edge up the gain control. Using the middle pickup of a 60s Strat, the gain can't be pushed much beyond nine o'clock before we hear

A pair of 6L6 output valves powers the Studio Signature

overdrive creeping in. That may not seem like a lot of leeway, but by that point, the Studio Signature is really shifting some air.

Next, we turn the master control down a touch and compensate for the volume drop by increasing the gain. Rather than getting an immediate increase in overdrive, we find that the gain control can now be advanced beyond 10 o'clock before overdrive onset and an accompanying midrange push makes the tone fatter and slightly smoother.

Going back to our original cusp-of-overdrive sound, we flick through the gain-structure settings to get a sense of what they do. It really is mostly about gain and touch sensitivity rather than frequency response, with the Matt Schofield signature setting immediately putting the Studio Signature into overdrive and the Blackface setting sounding cleanest of all. We can imagine the latter being a good bet for clean tones with hotter pickups, but we find the Traditional Two-Rock front end best suited to Fender-style single coils. It's louder, clearer and more dynamically responsive.

The way the tone controls operate and interact with the frequency boost switches is key to what the Studio Signature is all about. Although straightforward to operate and understand, there is clearly some sophistication here. Because the amp's core tone is so good, the tone controls aren't merely there to help you dial in a usable sound. Instead, they provide seemingly endless variations on crystalline clarity and refined excellence, because wherever you set them, you'll find wonderful tones.

The three frequency boost switches impress, too, because there's no attempt to justify their inclusion by making them too powerful. Two-Rock has targeted three genuinely useful frequency centres and provided just a sufficient boost. Used with the equalisation controls, the Studio Signature finesses tone much like a high-end recording channel handling a mic signal.

Combining Schofield mode with mid-boost is the easiest way to coax the Studio Signature into overdrive. It doesn't do metal, but if clear and smooth overdrive with impressive sustain and harmonic bloom sounds appealing, that's what you get. That said, you only get it with the gain and master controls cranked.

The half-power option was a feature we really appreciated on the Classic Reverb Signature – spending most of our time in 50- rather than 100-watt mode. The Studio Signature only has a push-pull pair of 6L6s, so a similarly configured power switch isn't an option. If used as a pedal platform, it's not an issue. Yet if you like some or all of your overdrive from the amp, consider whether the venues you play will allow you to run the Studio Signature at the required volume levels. Using an attenuator may be the solution at smaller gigs: we get some great results using ours. Plus, the Studio Signature sounds just as good with overdrive pedals; entirely as expected.

If you like your guitar tones rocky and rough edged, this isn't the amplifier for you. But it's a stellar pedal platform and offers pristine clean and edge-of-breakup tones in the contemporary West Coast style, with the addition of a lush-sounding and three-dimensional reverb. G

Every Two-Rock amplifier's internals are meticulously hand-wired and road-ready

8/10 **A sophisticated, superior-sounding pedal-platform amp with gorgeous reverb**

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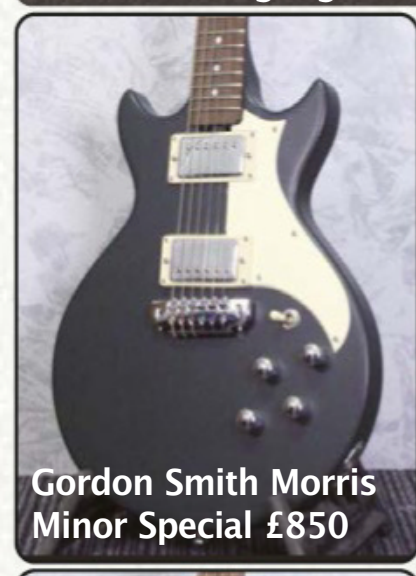
Gordon Smith Morris Minor Special £850

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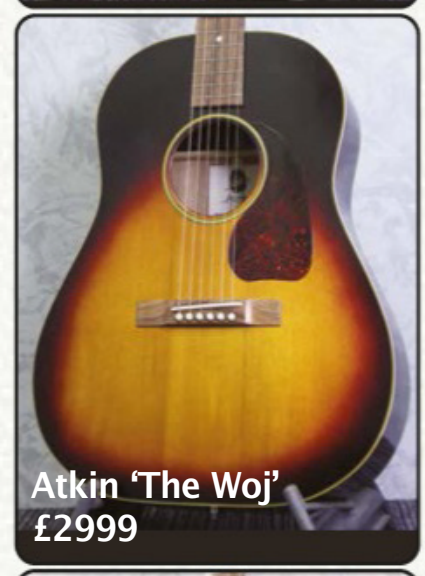
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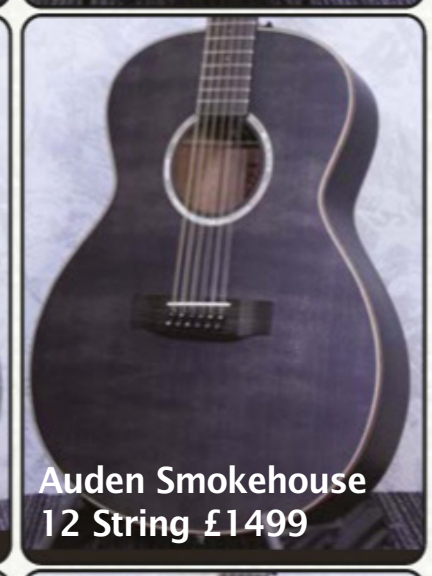
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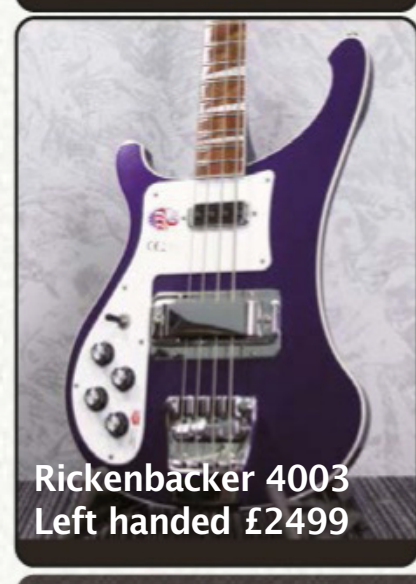
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BLACKSTAR
HT-20R MKII

WORDS RICHARD BARRETT

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Northampton's finest has overhauled its best-selling range for 2019. Here, our attention turns to a 20-watt combo with a low-power mode that will hit the sweet spot for many players…

Replacing Blackstar's HT Studio 20, this 1x12 combo carries a handful of features over from its predecessor – then adds quite a few more in the shape of footswitchable alternative voicings for each channel, emulated USB, headphone and XLR outputs, plus a switchable power output to facilitate driving the twin-EL84 power section hard at sociable volumes.

Along with its facelifted retro-British styling, the control panel has been relocated to the top of the cabinet for easier access when reaching down to tweak settings from a standing position, as many users certainly will. From left to right, there's a single quarter-inch jack input, then the clean channel's volume control. Then we find the clean channel's two-position voice switch, for selecting the basic character of the tonestack – more on this later. A single tone control allows for fine tuning of the selected voicing.

Next up is the OD select button. Like the voice switches, this can also be activated with the supplied two-button footswitch. As with the clean channel, we have gain, voice select and volume, but a much more detailed EQ section, featuring the usual bass, middle and treble, plus Blackstar's patented ISF control, for advanced shaping of the midrange character. The digital reverb and master volume controls are positioned immediately to the right, followed by another switch for selecting either two or 20 watts of output power, then finally, the sturdy metal power switch.

The rear panel offers a similar level of versatility. After the mains input on the left, there's a range of possibilities for connecting external speakers, as an alternative to the in-house-designed internal 12-inch unit. The options are single eight- or 16-ohm, or twin 16-ohm, so you can run this combo through two 4x12 cabs if you so wish.

If you'd prefer to appease the sound technician by going direct into the PA system, there's an XLR connection next in line, offering the choice between 1x12 or 4x12 cab emulations. These are also effective when using the headphone output found close by. An MP3/line input facilitates playing along with backing tracks, followed by a mono effects loop with a +4 or -10 dBV level switch, so rack or stompbox effects can work equally happily. After the footswitch connection socket, last in line is the USB audio connection,

The HT-20R offers huge versatility and a range of British and American-inspired sounds

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £649
DESCRIPTION 2-channel 1x12 amp with hybrid valve/solid-state preamp and valve power amp. Footswitchable channels/voicings, reverb, FX loop and emulated XLR/headphone and USB output. Made in China
POWER 20 watts, switchable to 2 watts
VALVES 2x ECC83/12AX7 (preamp) 2x EL84 (power)
CONTROL PANEL Volume, clean voice, tone, OD select, gain, overdrive voice, volume, bass, middle, treble, ISF, reverb, master volume, 2/20-watt output selector
REAR PANEL Speaker outs (1x 16 ohm/ 1x 8 ohm/2x 16 ohm), MP3/line input, speaker emulated/headphone output, effects loop send and return (with -10/+4 level switch), footswitch (two-button unit included), USB audio output
SPEAKER 1x12" custom design
DIMENSIONS 513 x 487 x 270mm
WEIGHT 16.1kg/35.5lb
CONTACT Blackstar Amplification blackstaramps.com

compatible with any recording platform and offering stereo cab emulation with reverb.

IN USE

Firing up the clean channel, voice one delivers a wide band, American-style tone

Twin power modes make the HT-20R MKII stage and bedroom friendly

The custom-designed 12-inch speaker handles everything we throw at it

with lots of headroom – though when pushed hard with the volume and tone controls, it will eventually start to break up at the edges. There are plenty of usable tones here, beautifully enhanced by the well-voiced digital reverb.

If edgier tones are what you're after, press the voice button (or footswitch) and the bright green light tells us we have selected voice two. The tone takes on a much edgier 'British' character, with added high mids helping to push the amp into a natural overdrive slightly earlier on the dials.

There's a wide choice of flavours available using both humbuckers and single coils, and it's particularly gratifying to be able to access these sounds via the two-watt setting, at what could just about be considered bedroom levels!

Selecting the OD channel, the amber light illuminates, and we now have access to the gain and EQ section, really making the most of those two ECC83s in the preamp. Voice one offers a smoother, slightly lower gain range (though there really is plenty here for most applications), which can be comprehensively shaped via the EQ and ISF controls. There's no presence control, but the treble and ISF do a pretty thorough job, so there's plenty of choice when shaping the high frequency character and 'cut'.

Selecting voice two ignites a red LED and the gain is moderately boosted; there's extra high-mid detail and what Blackstar describes as a "looser, more aggressive sound due to reduced power amp damping". We'd concur, but add that in practical terms, the net effect is very much like driving an older valve head with an overdrive pedal in the time-honoured style, so there's plenty of focus for modern metal riffs. G

9/10 **Versatile, affordable and hard to beat for small gigs and home practice**

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FENDER

TRE-VERB, LOST HIGHWAY PHASER & MTG TUBE DISTORTION

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

The new Fender stompboxes just keep on coming – but do these three multi-talented new units have the sonic chops to match their twiddle-friendly versatility?

It seems Fender's audacious 'taking effects pedals seriously' gambit is paying off. The original line of six stompers has now swelled to 15, and the latest batch includes this tastefully tinted trio: a combined tremolo and reverb, a twin-speed analogue phaser and a valve-powered distortion with added boost.

They're all housed in Fender's now familiar brushed-aluminium enclosures, with the same dinky LEDs in the control knobs (which can be switched off if you're anti-dinky). One thing they don't have, however, is the clever battery compartment design of the previous models… because they're mains-powered only.

This is understandable: the Tre-Verb is digital, the MTG Tube Distortion needs to pump 150 volts to feed its 6205 subminiature valve and even the Lost Highway Phaser demands 80mA of current, which would drain the average PP3 like a toddler downing a Fruit Shoot.

It's the Tre-Verb that catches our eye first, if only because of its obvious similarities with the Strymon Flint. But then, you could say Fender got there first: it's been pairing tremolo and reverb inside amplifiers since 1963. Things are a little different here to how they were on the original Vibroverb, though: you get three flavours of each effect to choose from and the reverb has separate dials for blend, dwell and tone. Got a stereo rig? There are even dual inputs and outputs.

The Lost Highway Phaser offers the lip-smacking prospect of two separate phaser speeds with Leslie-style ramping from one to the other. You also get switchable 4-stage and 8-stage phasing, two different wave shapes and a sensitivity control that lets the modulation speed respond to the level of the incoming signal. A one-knob wonder this is not.

And that brings us to the MTG, a distortion pedal designed in cahoots with Bruce Egnater of Egnater Amplification fame. Next to the three-band EQ here you get an extra control marked 'tight', for reining in the bottom end at higher gain levels. There's also a footswitchable boost, but this isn't available on its own, only as the cherry compote on top of your distortion cheesecake.

The boost on the MTG Tube Distortion is footswitchable

IN USE

The first problem we run into with the Tre-Verb is how to pronounce it. Tree-verb? Tray-verb? Trevor? Luckily, that's about the only problem we do run into, because this is a great little pedal. On the 'Tre' side, the choice is between optical, bias and harmonic tremolo and they all sound spot-on: opto pulsates with rhythmic clarity, bias rises and falls with a more gentle sway, and the Brownface-style harmonic mode adds a chewy dimension that also recalls the vibrato on an old AC30. You can't go to drastic extremes with rate or depth, but there is a tap-tempo function, accessed by holding down the footswitch.

The 'Verb' half of the pedal offers a choice between Brownface and Blackface spring reverbs, plus a plate type. The difference between the two springs is subtle – '63 is a touch bolder than '65 – but the plate sound ditches the wobbles for something much more pure and even. Note, though, that reverb trails are set to 'on' and we can see no way of turning them off.

The Lost Highway offers two separate phaser speeds, four or eight-stage phasing and a waveform switch

But we're not done with the Tre-Verb, because there's a surprise in store: a killer feature that isn't even mentioned in the manual or on the Fender site. Plug into two amps and select plate mode, and you're rewarded with a rich stereo spread. This can get truly immersive with both blend and dwell dials cranked; combine it with some moody tremolo and the Tre-Verb reveals itself to be a bit of a modern soundscaper as well as a vintage mojo machine.

The Lost Highway looks even more versatile on paper, but if you're after that classic swirling sound you might be left ever so slightly frustrated: at heart, this is more of a throbber than a swoosher. Fender was clearly anxious to make sure it wouldn't be the kind of phaser that scoops out your midrange – there's even a 3dB boost switch on the back to compensate for any perceived dip in output – but the result is that a little bit of sweetness is missing.

Using the second footswitch to drift between two different speeds opens up its gigging potential, while the sensitivity control allows you to make the modulation go wild with every new note, then gradually ease off in depth as well as rate as it decays.

Add the voice-modifying power of the two toggle switches and you're in a phasing playground – but would we rather be there than basking in the tonal purity of our battered old vintage Bad Stone? Probably not.

Things are more straightforward with the MTG: this is the shredding channel your amp never realised it had. The gain range goes from medium to high to even higher; and while this is a more rounded kind of distortion than you get from the average snarly rock box – as you might expect when there's a tube involved, even a teeny one – there's an edginess to the treble response on the wound strings that can make a Blackface amp feel almost like a JCM800.

It sounds pretty strident even with the mids backed off, but that's not to say this pedal is just a hooligan: bring out the Les Paul, turn the gain down to 10 o'clock, think about a deceased family pet and you'll find it can also handle the soulful stuff remarkably well.

The boost is tonally transparent, and the two knobs give you fully independent control over how much intensity you're adding to the dirt and how much sheer volume you're adding on the way out. The 'tight' control adds a worthwhile fourth element to a well-judged tonestack, and we can see this unit matching the Tre-Verb for the most important quality of all: sheer usefulness. Keep 'em coming, Fender.

The Tre-Verb also has tap tempo

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

TRE-VERB
PRICE £199
DESCRIPTION Tremolo and reverb pedal. Made in China
CONTROLS Tremolo output level, rate, depth and opto/bias/harmonic mode switch; reverb tone, blend, dwell and '63/'65/plate mode switch; signal path (T>R or R>T) and LEDs on/off switches; tap tempo on tremolo footswitch
FEATURES Stereo-through inputs and outputs, with stereo reverb in plate mode; buffered bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply with at least 310mA (not included)
DIMENSIONS 125 x 103 x 63mm

9/10 **A handy pairing of two tasty effects with plenty of tweakability**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Strymon Flint **£259**, Keeley EH Verb o Trem **£149**, Mr Black Deluxe Plus **£179**

KEY FEATURES

LOST HIGHWAY PHASER
PRICE £119
DESCRIPTION Phaser pedal. Made in China
CONTROLS Rate 1, depth 1, rate 2, depth 2, blend, feedback, input sensitivity, 4-stage/8-stage and sine/triangle waveform switches; 3dB boost and LEDs on/off switches; slow/fast ramping footswitch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply (not included)
DIMENSIONS 125 x 103 x 63mm

7/10 **Flexible wobbly fun, but not one for the phase-shifter purists**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Heptode Virtuoso **£180**, Walrus Audio Lillian **£192**, EarthQuaker Devices Grand Orbiter **£179**

KEY FEATURES

MTG TUBE DISTORTION
PRICE £159
DESCRIPTION Distortion pedal. Made in China
CONTROLS Treble, middle, bass, tight, level and gain; boost level and gain; LEDs on/off switch, boost footswitch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply with at least 290mA (not included)
DIMENSIONS 125 x 103 x 63mm
CONTACT Fender EMEA
fender.com

8/10 **A lump of pure rock that's got sensitivity as well as brawn**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Blackstar HT Dual **£229**, Ibanez Tube Screamer Nutube **£139**, Effectrode Tube Drive **£339**

VTS Top

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WALRUS AUDIO
SLÖ MULTI TEXTURE REVERB

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

A handwired box of dreamlike reverb flavours for the unhurried texturenaut. Time to tune up, turn up and zone out…

Sometimes, it's not all about frenetic sweep picking, ornamental arpeggios or artful blues turnarounds – sometimes, it's all about texture. Although it might be tempting to dismiss the resurgent 'shoegaze' movement as a cynical ploy by pedal companies to shift more units, the fact remains there's a growing subsection of players (doubtless inspired by the celestial workings of Radiohead's Ed O'Brien, Swervedriver and Ride) whose primary goal is the creation of otherworldly atmospheres. It's this group that Walrus Audio's latest offering, the Slö Multi Textured Reverb, is aimed at.

The jack and power sockets are top-mounted to make the unit pedalboard-friendly and the knobs are all smooth and precise. Controls include decay, mix and depth, with the added attraction of a filter and another knob simply marked 'X', which plays different roles depending on which algorithm has been selected.

A centre-mounted mini-toggle switch accesses three reverbs: Dark (adds a lower octave), Rise (ambient swell with a slow attack on the reverb) and Dream (latching pad controlled with the sustain footswitch). Secondary functionality is also accessed when you hold down the bypass switch, which changes the wave shapes of the reverb tail from a smooth sine wave with even pitch modulation (Sine) to warped record (Warp) and Bigsby drop (Sink).

IN USE

The sounds within are not only extremely high quality but also, crucially, usable. All too often, lush, multi-layered textures are added to pedals and multi-FX units almost as an afterthought but here, we discover new sonic landscapes that fit into both live and recorded mixes with little tweaking.

Our immediate favourite combinations are jangly Gretsch chords with the Dark sub octave grumbling underneath, summoning a choir of angels behind an acoustic guitar with the Rise setting and the psychonautic experience that is the Dream setting. With the sustain switch, it will surround you with swirling, somnambulant textures as you solo (tastefully) over the top.

The Slö's control system is intuitive, with a large amount of range to each parameter. The bass octave and modulation track perfectly and the top end remains silky and dynamic. Fans of self-oscillating, end-of-the-gig wig-outs will find a new friend here.

That's not to say the Slö is strictly limited to the Jazzmaster/Strymon enthusiasts out

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £192
DESCRIPTION Multi-voiced reverb pedal with deep functionality, made in the USA
CONTROLS Decay, filter, mix, X and depth knobs, mini-toggle with Dark, Rise and Dream voices and Sine, Warp and Sink tail waveforms. Bypass footswitch w/secondary functionality, sustain footswitch
FEATURES Three reverb voices, each fully tweakable, which can be combined with three wave shapes
DIMENSIONS 64 x 52 x 120mm
CONTACT Face Distribution
face.be walrusaudio.com

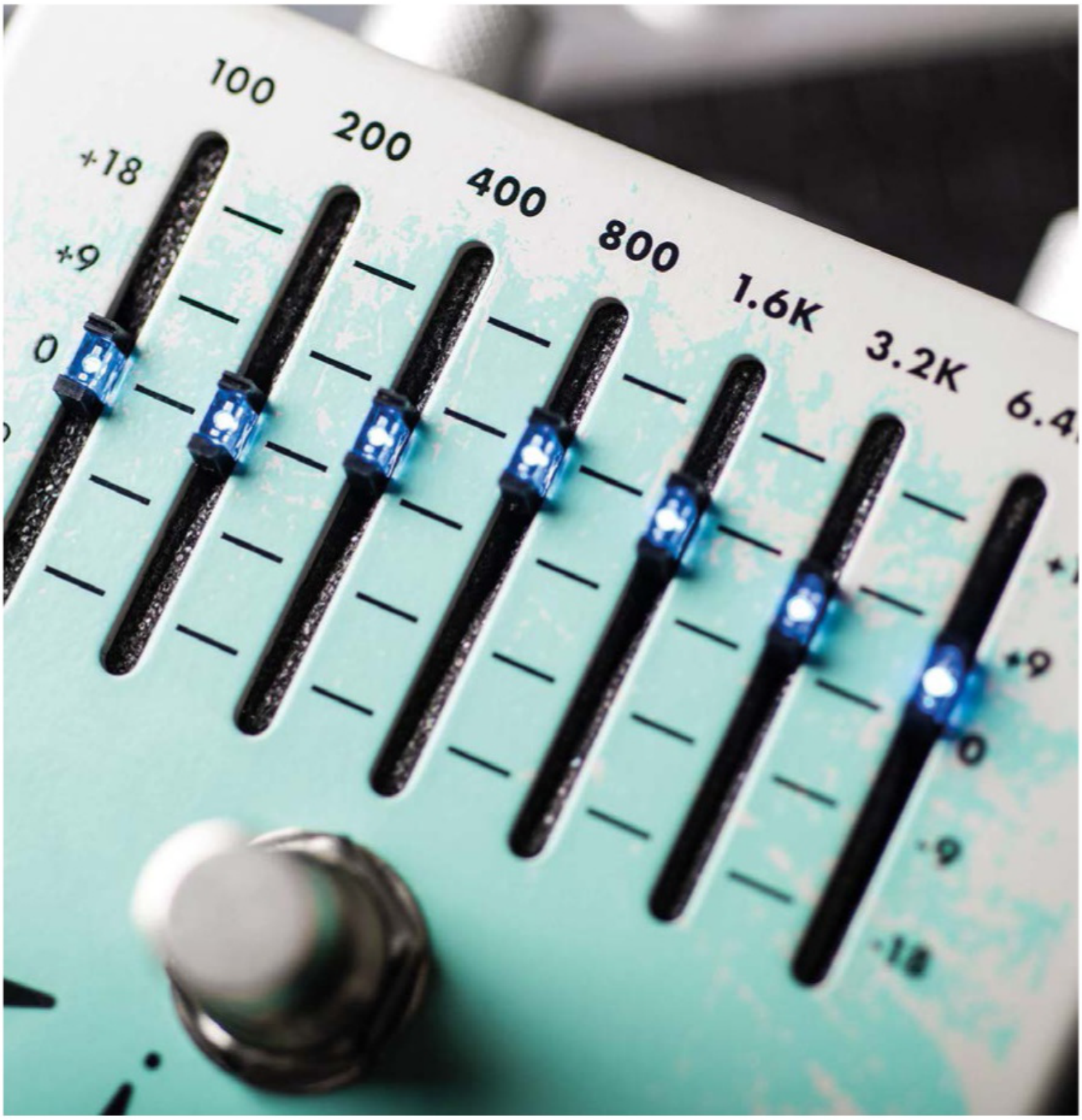
there, though. Overall, this is a powerful pedal with as much to offer composers of soundtracks, psychedelic rockers, soundscape artists and electronic-music producers as it does the eBow, Altoids and Instagram brethren. G

9/10 **A beautifully crafted dreamscape machine for the sonic world builder**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Meris Mercury7 **£319**, EHX Oceans 11 **£120**, Strymon BlueSky **£420**

The mini-toggle switches between three reverb types and a trio of reverb tail wave shapes



DUNLOP
SIETE SANTOS OCTAVIO FUZZ & JERRY CANTRELL CRY BABY WAH

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

These hefty chunks of engineering have been launched in honour of two very different artists in Billy Gibbons and Jerry Cantrell, but they both have the same job: to help you rock like a mutha

Jim Dunlop Sr may have left us in February, but the company he founded back in 1965 rolls on – and these two latest stompers provide a snapshot of the brand's broad appeal in 2019. One is an octave fuzz with seven-band EQ created for Billy Gibbons; the other is a restyled wah for Jerry Cantrell of Alice In Chains.

Billy's pedalboard has been known to feature both a Dunlop Octavio and a Boss GE-7 Equalizer; the Siete Santos puts both functions in one enclosure. It's a large wedge-shaped box that takes its main design cues from the all-white Octavio, itself based on the Roger Mayer device made famous by Jimi Hendrix. The sockets and knobs are all round the back, with the footswitch about as high up the top surface as the added EQ sliders allow. These offer up to 18dB of cut or boost on each frequency, and have handy LED markers.

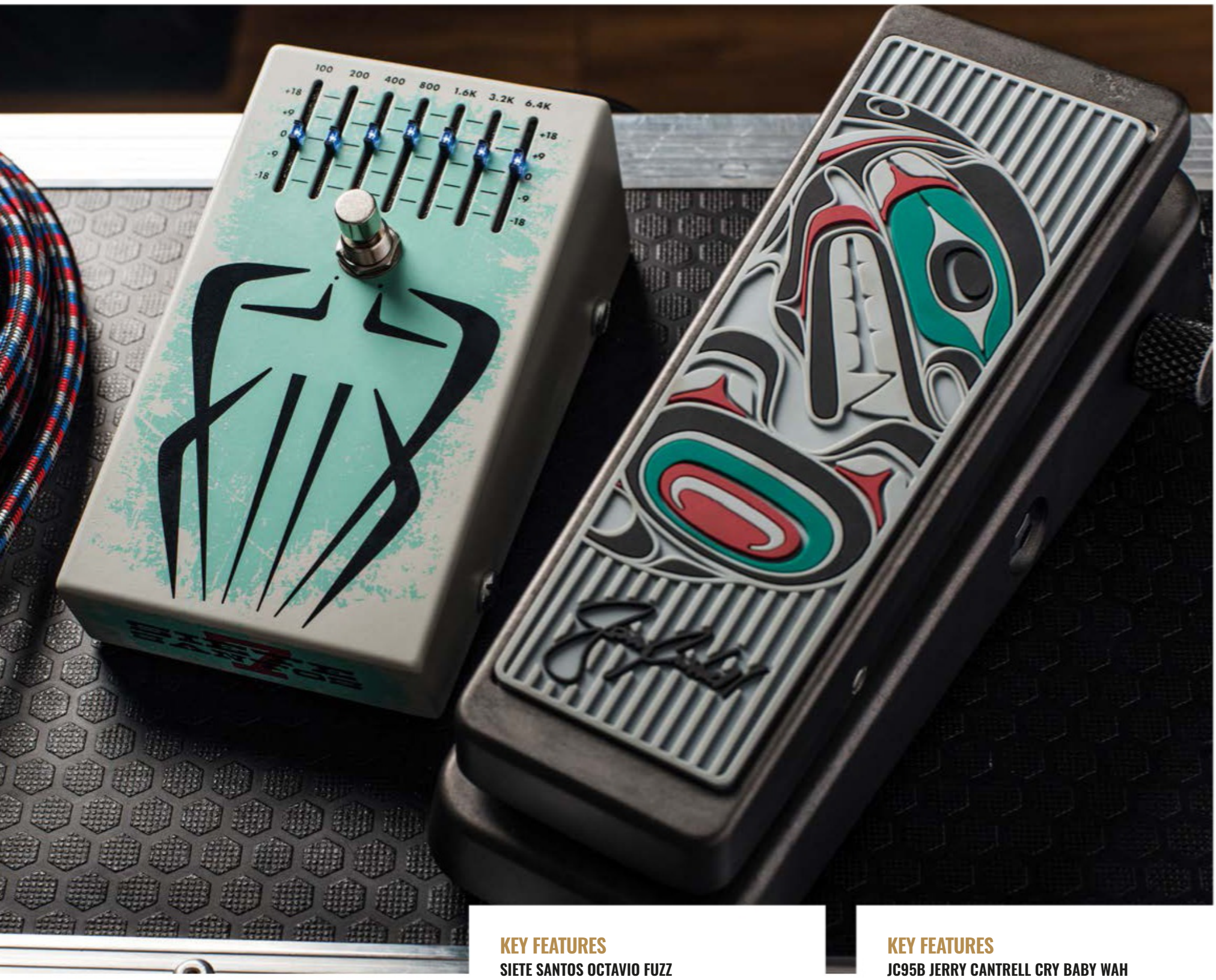
Cantrell wasn't even born when Dunlop started out, but his signature Cry Baby has been around for almost a decade now. This new version – limited to 500 units – has the same innards, but with a new 'industrial chic' paint job and, on the treadle, an image of Jerry's finest tribal tattoo.

IN USE

'Siete Santos' means 'seven saints' – but there ain't nothin' saintly about this thing. With fuzz cranked to full and all the EQ sliders zeroed at their centre notches, it roars into action with a rasping, riotously oversaturated blast of uncompromising noise. This is the fuzz effect as it was before people learned how to tame it. The upper octave only really makes itself heard above the 12th fret, but when it does arrive, it's pure *Purple Haze*.

Minimising the fuzz hardly turns this sonic gremlin into a house-trained beagle – in fact, it gets even more rough and ratty at lower gain levels, with chords losing much of their bottom end and single notes becoming more prone to spluttering out. You can even get some clanging ring-modulation sounds by playing pairs of notes at non-triad intervals.

There are no surprises with the EQ. Each of the seven sliders has its own, equally pronounced influence and we can see two distinct uses for this part of the pedal:



fine-tuning the top and/or bottom end for overall balance, and pushing or scooping the mids for dramatically altered 'feature' sounds. It's not an obvious partner for the fuzz, but it is a potentially creative one.

Arguably the worst thing about the Jerry Cantrell Cry Baby is the Alice In Chains lyric (from recent single *Rainier Fog*) printed on the baseplate. Turn it the right way up, though, and the fog clears quickly to reveal a very fine wah.

Dunlop describes the voice of the standard Cantrell model as "tight and punchy" and that's certainly what we get here with the side-mounted knob – which sets the top of the frequency range in toe-down position – set to minimum. It's about as 'vocal' as wahs get and that makes it hugely addictive.

What's more, the ability to open up the top end means you can make those treble peaks just as pointy as you want – a genuinely welcome feature that, as soon as we're put in charge of the world, will be made compulsory on all new wahs.

KEY FEATURES

SIETE SANTOS OCTAVIO FUZZ
PRICE £219
DESCRIPTION Octave-fuzz pedal with EQ. Made in USA
CONTROLS Level, fuzz, seven-band EQ
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply
DIMENSIONS 174 x 95 x 74mm

8/10 **Hendrix heroics and advanced tonal tweakery in one box**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Electro-Harmonix Graphic Fuzz **£144**, Roger Mayer Octavia Classic **£239**, Orange Fur Coat **£118**

KEY FEATURES

JC95B JERRY CANTRELL CRY BABY WAH
PRICE £174
DESCRIPTION Wah pedal. Made in USA
CONTROLS Toe-down frequency knob
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply
DIMENSIONS 250 x 117 x 88mm (with treadle up)
CONTACT Westside Distribution
westsidedistribution.com, jimdunlop.com

9/10 **A lovely-sounding wah with a useful treble-taming trick**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Dunlop John Petrucci Cry Baby Wah **£186**, Friedman No More Tears **£169**, Fulltone Clyde Standard Wah **£225**

DARIBEIRA
SALAMANDRA R112TW

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS HUW PRICE

If you like the tone of a speaker cabinet that's free to resonate, or you prefer the look of solid wood to tweed or tolex, this might be just what you're looking for…

Hand-made in Guimarães in northern Portugal with dovetail-jointed solid swamp ash or tulipwood, daRibeira cabinets are available with all the regular speaker configurations. Rather than tweed or vinyl coverings, the bare-wood cabinets are sprayed with thin lacquer coats before being fitted with Switchcraft jack sockets and faux-leather handles.

IN USE

The challenge when reviewing this attractive 1x12 cab is assessing the Salamandra independently of the speaker. Jensen describes its C12N as having aggressive mids, bright highs and loose lows. Here, the lows sound focused, punchy and deep, while the midrange isn't aggressive.

Compared to our Princeton-style cab, which has a Fane A60, the Fane has extended treble and high sensitivity, yet the supposedly less sensitive C12N sounds brighter and louder. It has a bigger tone, too, with a midrange response we associate with solid-wood cabinets. Merely tapping the Salamandra produces clear notes; the cab is clearly contributing to the overall tone, and it projects impressively.

Although we hear a slightly papery rasp, experience tells us it's a speaker thing – the cab itself is buzz and rattle free. Besides a slight kink in the speaker cloth in the upper-right corner, it's beautifully made.

The lacquer offers the wood little protection and great care will be needed to maintain the Salamandra's looks if used for gigging. As a home or studio cab, these concerns don't apply; we appreciate its light weight and cannot fault the sound. G

9/10 **It'll need to be treated carefully, but this cab sounds as fantastic as it looks**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Zilla Cabs solid-pine 1x12 cabinet **£400**, GLB Micro **€980**, Victory V112C **£374**

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €419
DESCRIPTION Solid tulipwood open-back 1x12" cabinet. Made in Portugal
POWER RATING 50W
SPEAKER Jensen C12N (as reviewed)
DIMENSIONS 500 x 450 x 280mm
WEIGHT 11.5kg/25.3lb
CONTACT daribeira.webs.com

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Finished in Vintage Sunburst. Made in Japan. PAF Style Pickups. Vintage Style Hardware. Rosewood Fingerboard. Includes Hard Case.

Gibson 2010 ES-175 VSB
All original. Dual '57 Classic PAF Humbuckers. Trapeze Tailpiece. Excellent condition throughout. Original Hard Case & Docs.

Millman Telecaster
Made in Bideford, UK. By luthier James Millman. Book matched Brazillian Rosewood Top with Ash Body. Fred Steward Pickups.

MusicMan 2016 StingRay 5 H
Single Alnico Humbucker. Active 3 Band EQ with 3 way switch. Maple Fingerboard. Includes original Hard Case.

G&L USA JB-2
Finished in 3-Tone Sunburst with Satin Neck. Made in USA. J-Style Shape. Fantastic condition. With Original Hard Case.

Fender American Professional P Bass
Single Michael Bump-Designed V-Mod Pickup. '63 P Bass Neck Profile. Vintage Style Bridge. With Hard Case.

Fender Player P Bass
Finished in Buttercream. Alder Body. Traditional Split Coil Pickups. 9.5" Radius Pickups. Modern C Shaped Neck.

Rickenbacker 4003 Midnight Blue
Brand New! Stunning Deep Blue finish. A Classic Timeless Bass guitar. More Photos & info online. Comes with Hard Case.

Sandberg Basic VM4 EB (Black Satin)
Made in Germany. Ash Body. Split Coil & Powerhumbucker Pickups. Active 2 Band Tone. Six bolt Maple Neck.

Fender Jaco Pastorius Bass
Signature Bass. Fretless. Select Alder Body. Pau Ferro Fingerboard. American Vintage Single Coil Pickups. Inc Fender Hard Case.

Fender FSR '51 Telecaster PJ Bass
2018 American. Parallel Universe Collection. Limited Edition. Ash Body. Nitrocellulose Finish. Custom Shop Pickups. Hard Case Inc.

Gibson 2011 Dove
Sitka Spruce Top. Maple Back & Sides with Flame. 3 Piece Maple Neck. Nitrocellulose finish. Includes original Gibson Hard Case.

Martin USA GPCPA1 Plus
Featuring East Indian Rosewood Back & Sides. Solid Spruce Top. Built in Fishman F1 Aura Plus Pickup System. Hard Case Inc.

Taylor 412e Grand Concert
Solid Sitka Spruce Top. Solid Ovangkol Back & Sides. Built in Taylor Expression 2 Pickup System. With Original Hard Case and Docs.

Taylor 524e Grand Auditorium
All Mahogany. Built in Expression 2 Pickup System. Made from Tropical Mahogany. Ebony Fingerboard. Original hardcase & docs.

Rickenbacker 330 Jetglo
In Stock - Just arrived! Classic Ricki Design. Rosewood fingerboard. Maple Hollowbody. Hi-gain pickps. With Hard case.

Rickenbacker 330/12 Fireglo
Deluxe Hollow Body with a special contoured body. Rosewood Fingerboard with Triangular Inlays. Made in USA. With Hard Case.

Fender American Performer Telecaster
Humbucking pickup in Neck position & Yosemite Single coil in Bridge. Finished in Aubergine. Includes Padded Gig Bag.

Fender American Performer Strat
Alder Body. SSS. Yosemite Single Coil Pickups. Push-pull activates neck pickup. Finished in Penny. Maple Fingerboard. Inc Gig Bag.

Blackstar HT-Club 40 MKII
2 Channels. 4 Voices. 40watts EL34. Blackstars unique ISF control. Power reduction from 40 to 4 watts. USB recording.

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HOW TO CONVERT AN EPIPHONE FLYING V TO 1950S SPEC PART ONE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Far rarer than Les Paul Standards of the same year, few people have even seen a 1958 Gibson Flying V in the flesh, let alone played one. Here, we take an Epiphone Joe Bonamassa signature 'Amos' model and see how close we can get to the Holy Grail…

If you're a Gibson player and you want a Les Paul or an SG, there's a model for every style and budget. But when it comes to Flying Vs, Gibson doesn't currently manufacture a 1950s-spec Korina reissue. If you can get hold of one, Epiphone's recent limited-edition Joe Bonamassa 1958 'Amos' Korina Flying V model features impressive specs for a model that originally retailed around £750. A friend of the *Guitar.com* team was so impressed that he bought one and has been gigging with it over the last year or so.

The guitar is made from period-correct Korina and features 50s-style through-body stringing. There's a fairly chunky neck profile too, apparently modelled on Joe's own Flying V, along with vintage-style tuners and a fine-quality hard case.

Yet over time, the nagging feeling crept in that this Flying V could be even better – the thick, dark gloss poly finish and jumbo fretwire being the chief areas for improvement. Delving deeper, the owner wasn't keen on either the dot markers or the milky finish covering the fingerboard. And with a spare set of late-60s Patent Number humbuckers sitting unused in his parts box with some CTS control pots, upgrading the electronics is a no-brainer.

Epiphone has mounted the bridge using metal bushings rather than screwing the posts into the wood itself, so the plan is to change this to as-close-as-possible to vintage specifications. The owner has also sourced some high-end replica parts, including a plastic truss-rod cover and a more vintage-correct metal 'V' plate to cover the string holes. The brief is straightforward – let the vintage makeover begin…

TEAR DOWN

Removing the parts from this Epiphone Flying V is no different to any other guitar. I had expected the bridge-post bushings to be tough to remove, but they are so loose in their holes that they lift straight out.

The V-shaped metal plate that the strings pass through is actually nailed onto the body. To remove it, I use my end nippers. The finely ground jaws get under the nail heads to lift them up a few millimetres and from there, I use a regular claw hammer to pull them free.

It's important to lift the nails out gently, because they're serrated for grip. Also use some masking tape to protect the surface if you're trying something similar and plan to reuse the metal plate. The string ferrules present a bit more of a challenge, because I discover – the hard way – that they're glued in.

With Telecaster ferrules, I'm accustomed to passing an appropriately sized drill bit through the string holes and gently easing them out by tapping the drill bit from the front side of the body. Attempting the same here, the first ferrule comes flying out, taking a chunk of wood and a large patch of finish with it.

It transpires that the ferrules and the wood are firmly bonded to the finish. In fact, the bond between the Korina wood and the finish is stronger than the bonds between the wood fibres themselves. I fix

OPPOSITE Scraping the finish reveals the two layers and produces good results, but it's too time consuming

ABOVE The heat gun removes the glossy toffee-coloured top coats and leaves the yellowish base coat intact

LEFT The base coat on the left is closer to the colour most people associate with 50s Flying Vs

the detached chunk of finish and wood back onto the body using Cascamite glue.

Rather than risk further damage to the guitar, I decide to heat the remaining ferrules before attempting to remove them. With my soldering iron set to 450 degrees, I insert the tip into one of the ferrules and after a minute or so, I try tapping. It comes out cleanly and I work my way through the remaining four using the same method.

At last I'm left with just the body – it's astonishingly light. It weighs a fraction over 2kg, which is one whole kilogram lighter than the Greco Les Paul replica body that I used for last year's Goldtop conversion project. To put this into context, the Goldtop ended up weighing 3.8kg fully loaded – or 8.4lb if you prefer – which is on the lighter end of the vintage Les Paul spectrum.

STRIP DOWN

In the official promotional video for this model, Joe Bonamassa says that they could have done an aged model, but "part of the fun with guitars is putting your own marks on them". I agree with Joe's sentiment, but the poly finish is so tough on this guitar that it's unlikely to exhibit any significant playwear for the remainder of this century, at least.

I experiment with Nitromors, but after that fails, I try scraping the finish with a fresh craft-knife blade and eventually get through the outer layer in a small area at the end of the body. In the process, I dull two blades and I have to accept that it will take too much time and effort to strip the body this way. So, it's back to 'Plan A' and with a feeling of weary resignation, I dig out my paint-stripping heat gun, which can easily be found in any DIY store.

The difficult part is getting your technique right, so the finish comes off without damaging the guitar. Two things concern me here. It's very easy to scorch the wood when you're doing this and since Korina is so pale, and the finish is going to be clear, it won't be possible to hide any burn marks. In addition, close examination has revealed that the front and back of the body are veneered.

Epiphone did a great job, because the two-piece body is centre joined and the joins in the veneers line up perfectly. But the added danger is that too much heat will cause the glue to let go and the veneer might bubble up. Having stripped a few other poly-finished guitars using a heat gun, I know that the secret to a successful outcome is to accept that it can take a very long time and that the finish will only peel off when it's ready to.

If you try to persuade it with your scraper knife, you'll end up damaging the wood. When you get bored or frustrated, you're more likely to try and speed things up. Instead, accept that it's time to take a break and come back to it when you're in a better mood.

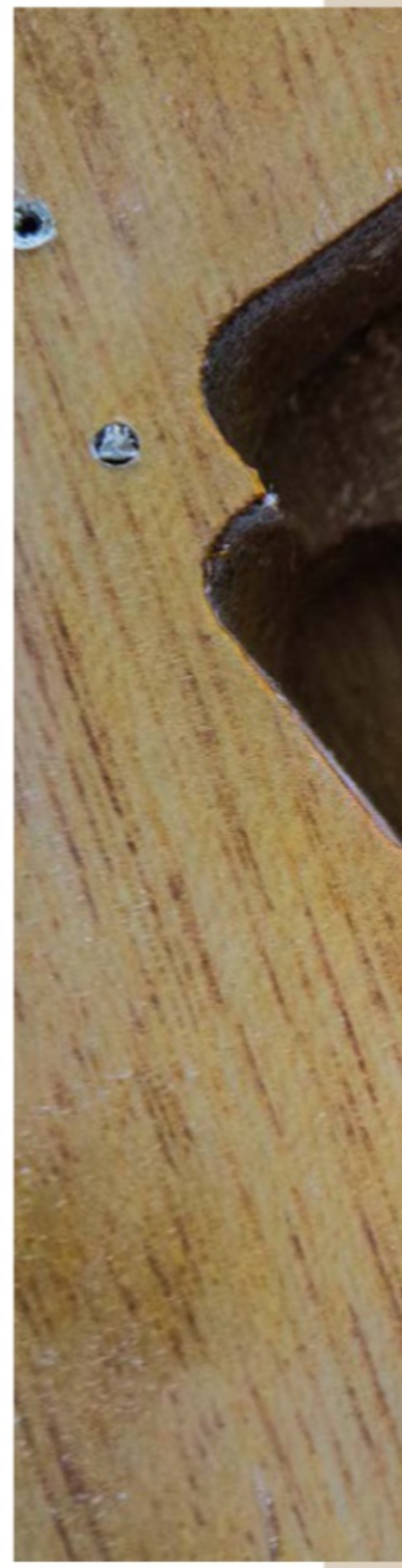
With the V firmly clamped in my trusty workbench out in the backyard, the poly bore-fest begins. I would strongly advise that you work outdoors and wear a breathing mask, because the fumes smell

OPPOSITE The ferrule hole at the top 'blew out' all too easily, but all the other ferrules came out cleanly

ABOVE TOP The back is stripped, sanded and wiped with white spirit to approximate the eventual colour after spraying

ABOVE Cellulose sanding sealer is sprayed and sanded flat to confirm that it will fill the pits and adhere to the base coat

LEFT The scorch marks have been sanded off the wood and a rasp is used to strip the finish from the damaged side



ABOVE Eventually, we're back to bare wood and it's sanded and ready for staining

RIGHT Mixing amber stain with a hint of medium brown results in a decent colour match and we might just about get away with it

OPPOSITE Ash plugs are tapped into the drilled-out bushing holes and Super Glue is run around the outsides

horrible. Although I don't know for sure that they're toxic, it's safest to assume that they are.

My earlier experiments with scraping the finish revealed that beneath the toffee-coloured gloss exterior there's a lighter coloured base coat that Epiphone most likely applied as a sealer for the very open-grained Korina. Now, as I begin with the heat gun, I discover that the gloss coat separates to leave the base coat intact.

I have to decide whether to try and remove this base coat so I can get down to the wood, or attempt to preserve it. The base coat is far more heat resistant than the top coat and I realise that if I can keep it intact, I won't have to bother with grain filler and all the other preparation work usually involved in spraying nitro over open-pore wood.

There are two potential complications. Firstly, removing the gloss coat leaves the base coat slightly pitted. Secondly, I need to establish that the base coat will be compatible with nitrocellulose lacquer. I decide to sand one small area smooth and spray it with Manchester Guitar Tech's sanding sealer (manchesterguitartech.co.uk).

The idea is to spray it on thickly to ensure that it will adhere to the base coat and then, after it has dried, level it to determine if it can fill the countless tiny marks in the base coat. It passes both tests, so now I know that I need to keep the heat gun on its lowest setting and concentrate on removing only the gloss coats.

BEST-LAID PLANS

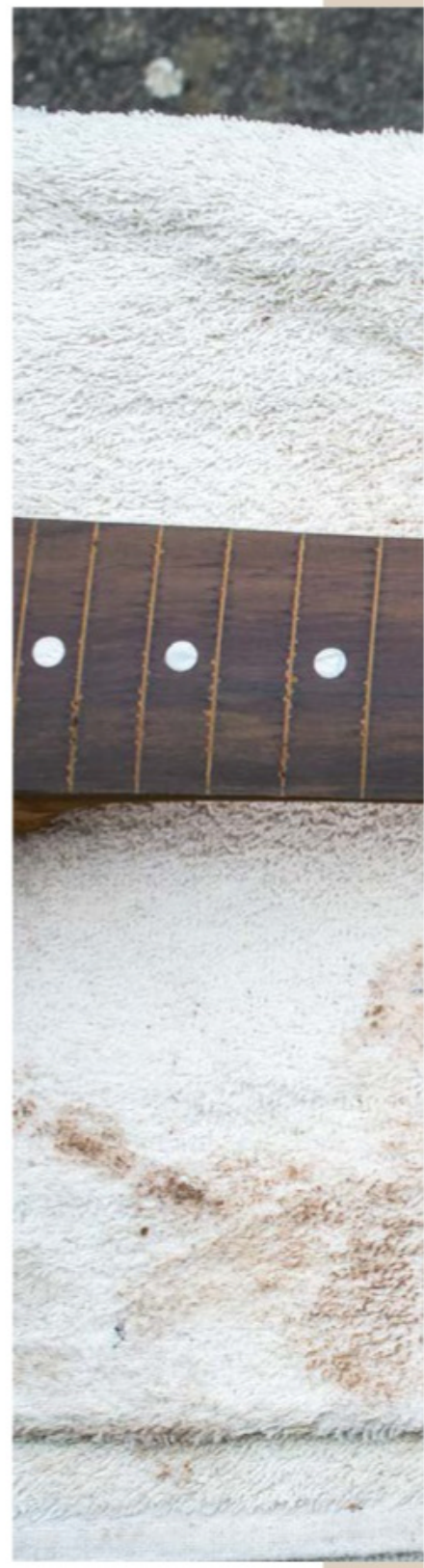
It all sounds simple, and for the most part it is, but one moment of inattention when I'm stripping the bass side of the body causes the finish and the base coat to blister and start popping off in red-hot shards. And of course, a small section of the wood gets scorched.

Incidents like this can be regarded as disasters or learning opportunities and I'm going with the latter. Figuring out how to rectify your screw-ups is a big part of lutherie and I now have to decide on a strategy. The area of damage is about 15cm long and there's no way I'm going to be able to blend it into the adjacent areas. Instead, I decide to strip the entire side back to bare wood.

It's not as easy as it sounds, because I am unable to remove the remaining base coat using the heat gun without the risk of damaging an even wider area. I try sanding and make little progress – even with 80-grit paper. Eventually, I resort to using my rasp and even this formidable tool struggles.

The teeth quickly clog up with dust and I have to use a file brush to clear it every few minutes. But eventually, I get through the base coat and once I've followed up with a sanding block, I have a flat and clean wood surface. Now I have to try and even up the colour and mixing StewMac stains – vintage amber with a drop of medium brown in isopropyl alcohol – gets me pretty close.

Shellac is used as a sealer before I apply grain-filler tinted with red stain to try to match the rest of the body. The grain lines end up a little dark, but the background



colour is pretty good and I spray the side with more cellulose sanding sealer. Once dry, this is flatted back and it looks passable. Disaster is averted, but I will need to buy a new rasp.

GOING DOTTY

Projects like this always reach the point where the guitar looks worse than it did before you started. However, there is something I need to do before spraying that may redress the balance. I want to get the lacquer off the fingerboard and replace the dots.

I begin by removing all the frets, and stabilising any chips along the fret slots using Super Glue. Drilling a test hole on one of the marker dots reveals that they're not plastic. Instead, I suspect Epiphone used some sort of filler paste that was packed into the hole and allowed to solidify before the board was levelled and sprayed.

Celluloid pearl dots can be sourced from Rothko And Frost (rothkoandfrost.com) and at 6mm, their diameter is slightly wider than the factory dots. I carefully mark the centre point of each dot and then drill them out with a 6mm brad-point bit. Centralising the bit is crucial, but I end up with cleanly cut holes and the celluloid dots tap in with a dab of Super Glue.

With the truss rod adjusted to straighten the neck, within a few minutes the dots and fingerboard are levelled using 240-grit paper attached to a 12-inch radius block. Sanding through the coating reveals the grain and true colour of the pau ferro fingerboard for the first time and I think the playing feel will improve along with the looks. The smaller frets that the owner requested are installed and I'll be dressing the ends before respraying the guitar.

POST-HOLE PLUGS

The bridge-post holes were drilled with two different diameters to conform to the shape of the metal inserts. Viewed in cross section, the inserts are 'T' shaped, so rather than fill the holes in two stages, I decide to drill out the holes to 0.5 inches. This is slightly wider than the top of the existing post holes, and I tap in two lengths of 0.5-inch ash dowel rod after coating the insides of the holes with Titebond glue.

Once the glue is set, I run a generous quantity of Super Glue around the outside edges of the dowels and leave it to set overnight. Of late, I've become a big fan of Super Glue for grain and gap filling and once the dowels are sanded flush with the top, they feel completely smooth.

I'll apply some of the leftover amber/brown stain to the dowels and cover the ends with more Super Glue to seal the grain before spraying. It will be impossible to make the plugs invisible without a solid-colour finish, but the pickguard will cover the treble side and I'll use a second thumbwheel at the base of the string post to conceal the plug on the bass side.

Next time you see this guitar, the respray will be done and I'll be onto the relic'ing and reassembly processes. In the meantime, while the lacquer is setting, I'll turn my attention to re-fretting a Strat neck… G

OPPOSITE The plugs are levelled and will be stained, but both should end up hidden once the guitar is completed

ABOVE With the frets removed and celluloid dots installed, the 'board is sanded to reveal the attractive colour and grain pattern of pau ferro

LEFT The fret ends will need to be dressed before spraying, but we're hopeful the neck will feel nicer to play

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Hubert Sumlin backed up Howlin' Wolf with simple yet lyrical lead-guitar lines – follow our lesson to master the basics

EXAMPLE 1

PART SIX
COMBINING BASIC RHYTHM AND LEAD

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

In the previous instalment of our guide to the basics of blues-guitar playing, we discussed the minor pentatonic scale in its first shape. This scale will be used to start forming our lead-guitar lines

Using notes from the A minor pentatonic scale below, in this lesson, we're going to look at some 12-bar blues rhythms and combine some simple lead lines with the rhythmic patterns that we have learnt over the last few lessons.

First, we should cast our minds back to lesson two and refresh on the second shuffle pattern that we learnt, which you can find in full at *Guitar.com*.

We'll be taking this shuffle pattern and adding some simple embellishments from the minor pentatonic scale to incorporate lead-guitar playing.

This will not instantly make you sound like a blues hero, but it will start to get your fingers moving and serve as a fantastic starting point for your lead-guitar skills to develop. The examples over the page make up the pattern in full. I'll break this down into four-bar segments so we can look at what is going on each step of the way:

In the first bar, we're sticking to our shuffle rhythm to get our groove locked in. This is played as it was in the lesson which covered blues shuffles: "1 a 2 a 3 a 4 a".

In the second bar, we stick with the same rhythmic feel, but the last two notes are now substituted by a D and C note – the 7th and 5th fret on the third (G) string. This is the first embellishment. It locks into the rhythm of the piece, but adds a melodic touch.

The third bar retains a similar feel to the first bar, except the final two notes. On the "4 a", go from the 7th fret of the fourth (D) string up to the 5th fret of the third (G) string.

The final bar ends with a descending four-note run, starting on the 5th fret of the

THE A MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE

EXAMPLE 2

EXAMPLE 3

EXAMPLE 4

fourth (D) string on the "a 4 + a". In bar 5, we play the IV chord shuffle over the D chord as normal. In the sixth bar, we start to go up the pentatonic scale from the fourth beat, playing the 8th fret of the second (B) string and the 5th fret of the second (B) string on the "4 a" beats.

In bars 7 and 8, we can see the end phrases start to form into some patterns which we might then recognise as being typical of playing lead guitar. Both phrases follow the timing of "a 4 + a", but both use the pentatonic notes in a different order.

In the ninth bar, we move up to the V chord (this is E in the key of A minor) and this phrase ends with a four-note descending run on the "a 4 + a". This starts on the 9th fret and runs back to the 7th and 5th frets. This position shift may be a little tricky at first. Take your time to make sure you're hitting the notes cleanly.

Then we go back to the IV chord over the 10th bar, but now ending with another descending run from the 8th fret of the second (B) string also over the "a 4 + a" beats of the bar. You will want to reach up to the 8th fret with your little finger, if possible to make the jump up from the 5th fret of the third (G) string a little easier.

The final two bars are back on the I chord, as expected with a standard 12-bar cycle. The 11th bar is just the straight shuffle rhythm and the final bar ends with a longer, ascending run up the scale. This final run encompasses two full beats and rhythmically fits into "3 + a 4 + a". This is a tricky run to get started with, as you want the rhythm of the 12-bar to be undisrupted. Immediately after ending on the 8th fret of the second (B) string, you would be back on your '1' beat of the first bar and the cycle repeats.

TRY IT YOURSELF

If you've followed the series so far and you've tried out some of the shuffle rhythms in other keys, you will find this lesson is also transposable around the guitar. The added notes here are not a 'set in stone' method for learning lead guitar, but I think they will certainly help your fingers start to move and it will also allow you to see how important rhythmic aspects of lead guitar can be when playing blues. If you feel particularly adventurous, try to substitute the added notes for notes of your own choice from the pentatonic scale.

If you have enjoyed this lesson and you're looking for a guitar tutor in your local area, check out our guitar lessons page at *Guitar.com* and speak to one of our highly recommended teachers. **G**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He's taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the MGR Music platform. To find a qualified guitar tutor in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

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Johnny Marr's approach to arpeggios involves the use of open-string chords and picking patterns with inventive rhythms

FIGURE 1

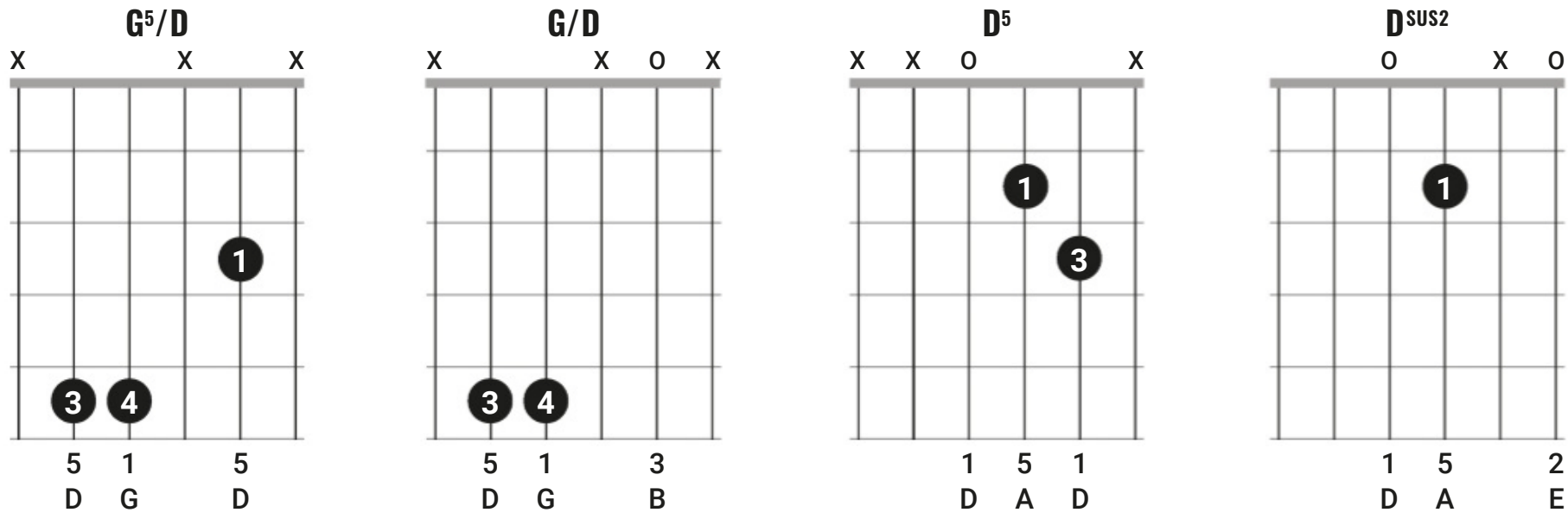
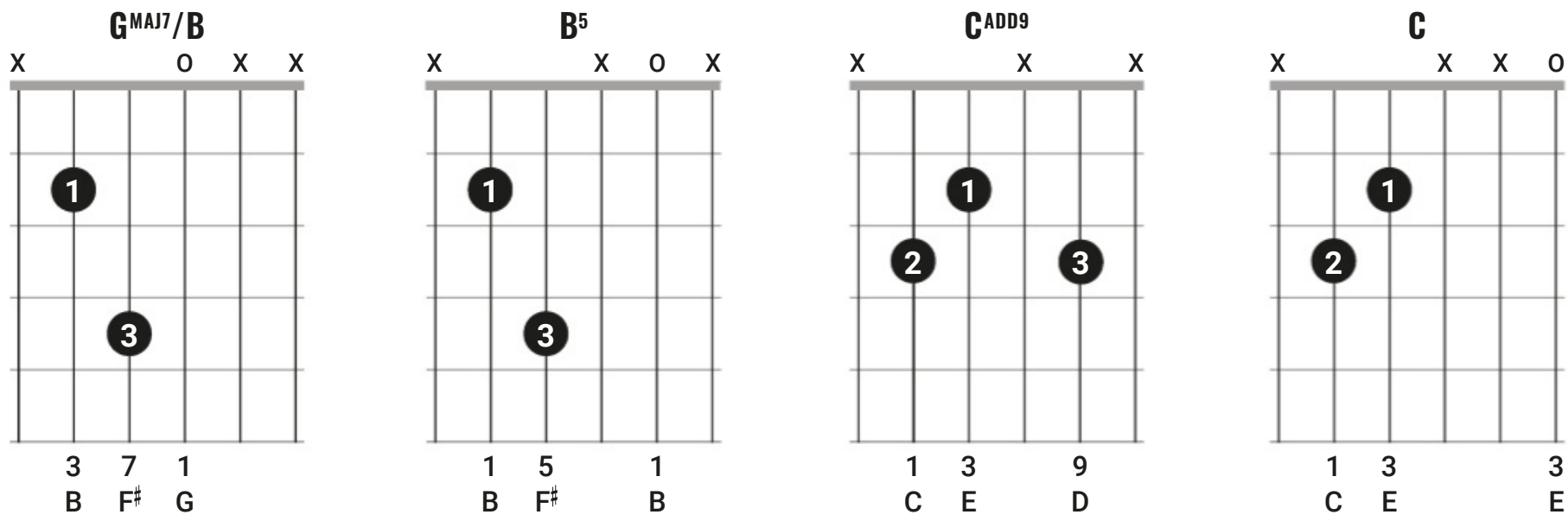


FIGURE 2



CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY JOHNNY MARR-STYLE CHORDS PART TWO

WORDS ROD FOGG

Following on from part one of our Johnny Marr chord sequence workout, we take a look at the arpeggios that form such an essential part of his guitar style

Johnny Marr's playing can be sparse yet harmonically complex, and seemingly simple but rhythmically inventive. This is often achieved through note choices, including the selection of open strings to sound against held notes, and the rhythmic choices when playing arpeggios, for example, grouping notes in mixtures of threes and twos to play across the rhythm of the bar. Figure 1 demonstrates these methods with two three-note G major chords, both made slightly unstable by the presence of the fifth, rather than the root, in the bass.

Play the notes of the first chord, from low to high, followed by the notes of the second chord, and then repeat just the lower two notes – let them all ring as much as possible. This should give you a rhythm like '123,123,12'. You should also hear a melody emerging from the notes you are playing on the second (B) string.

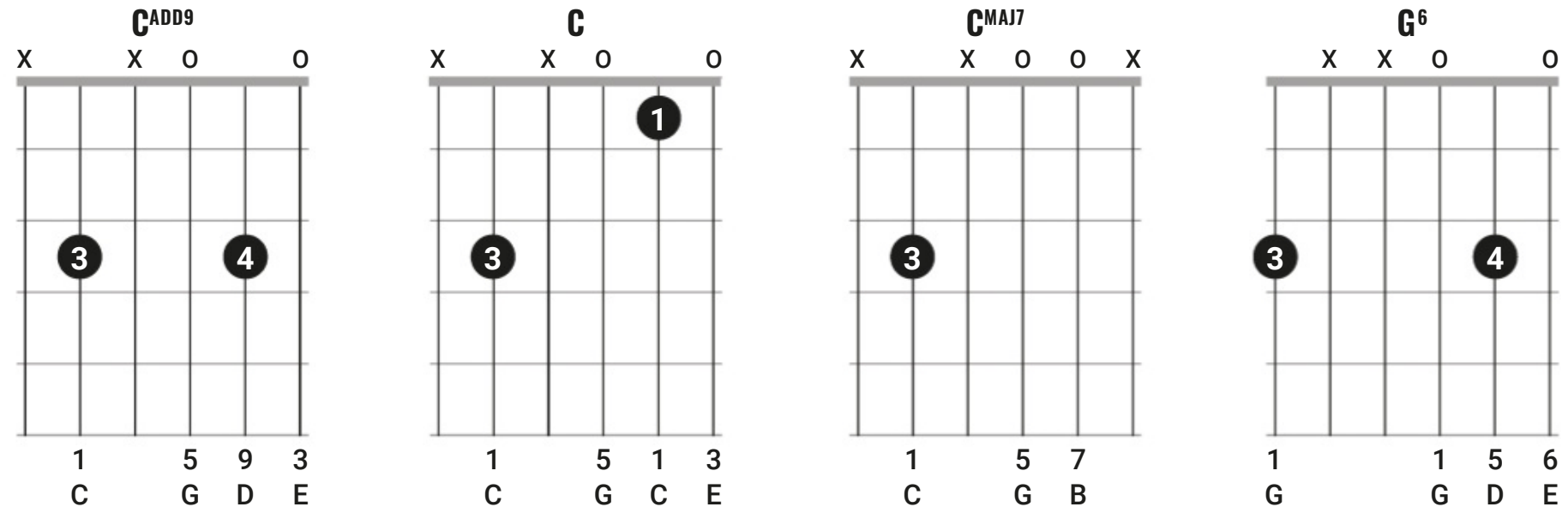
This is where the rhythmic complexity comes in, as these notes are falling on the second beat and the 'and' after the third beat, contrasting with the underlying 3-3-2 rhythm. Repeat, and then try the same approach with the two D chords, where you should similarly hear a melody emerging between the second and first (B and E) strings. Choose a bright, clean tone and if you can, add a touch of delay and chorus. Ideally, use a pick – but you could also use thumb, index and middle fingers, starting with the thumb on the bass note.

In figure 2, stay with the same eight-count picking pattern but play all eight notes on one chord, one chord per bar. Notice how the tension between the F sharp and G in the G major seventh chord is resolved by changing to a different open string in the B5 chord, and that the B bass note goes from being the unstable third in the bass to the stable root note.

Talking of harmonic complexity, we have a major seventh, a V chord, an added 9 and a plain major chord all achieved with carefully chosen three note voicings. Figure 2 follows on from figure 1; you can loop the two sequences around to make an eight-bar chord sequence.

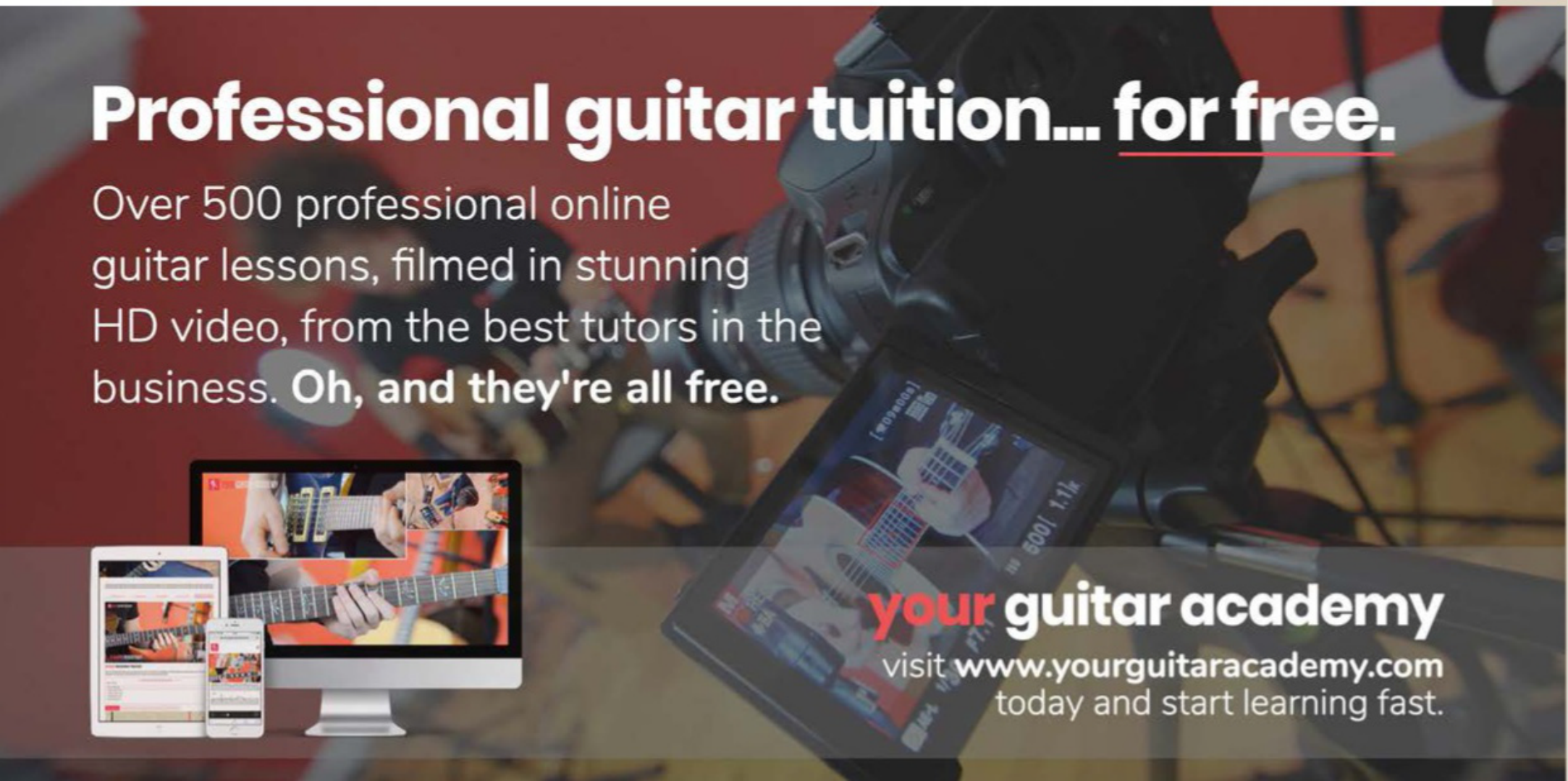
Figure 3 uses the same '123,123,12' picking rhythm, but it might be better to

FIGURE 3



finger-pick this one as we need the note on the second (B) string to sound at the same time as the bass note; then pick the open third and first (G and E) strings. This way, the first three chords would make up one bar of music while the second three chords would be in the second bar.

Rhythmic interest comes from the way the melody emerges on the second (B) string, while adding in the bassline adds an ambiguous quality. Played round and round over eight bars, this could be the backing to a verse.



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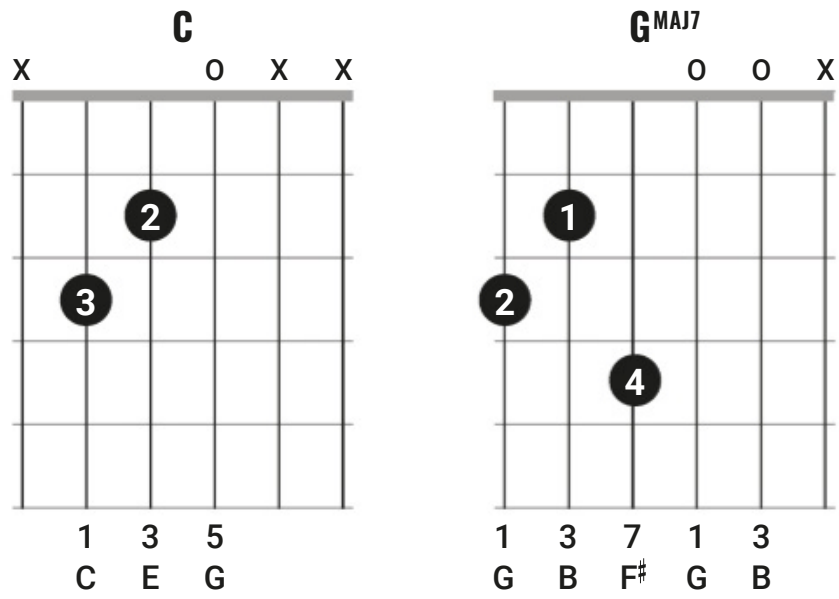

FIGURE 5

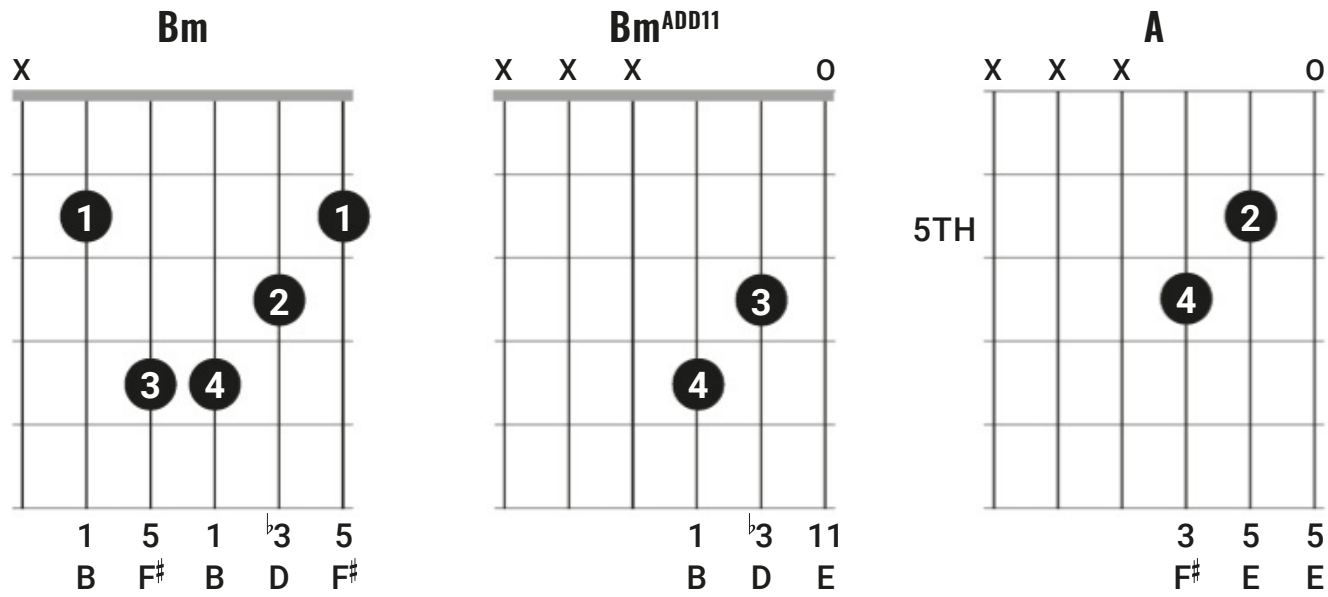

FIGURE 6

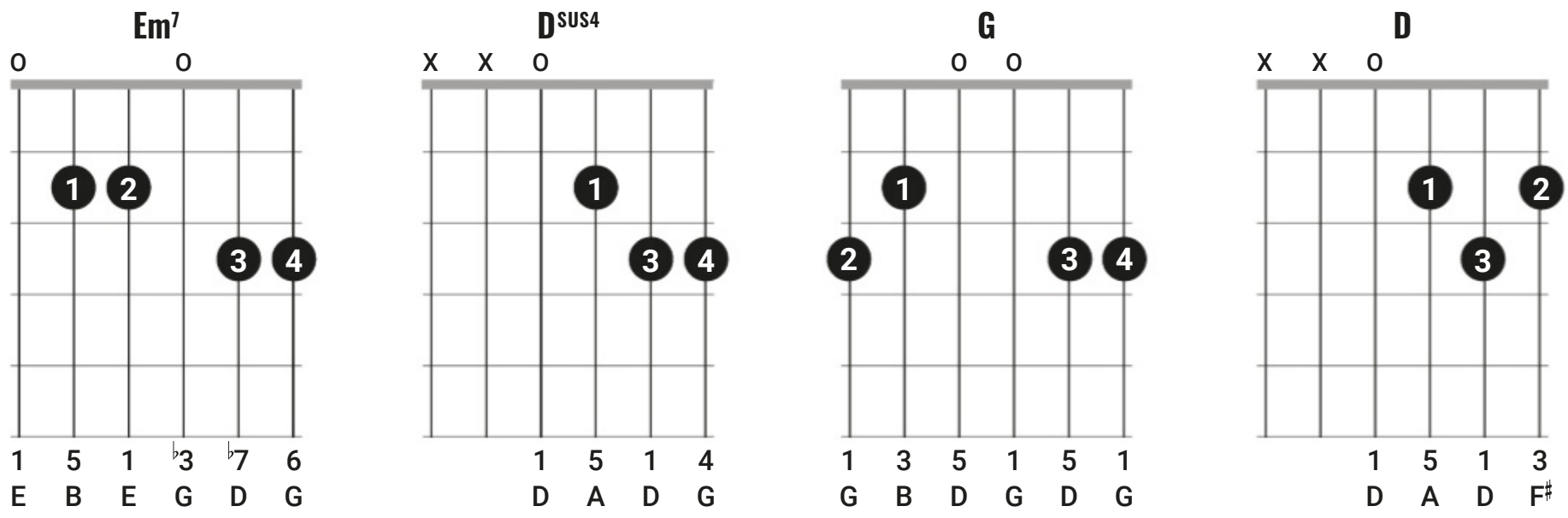

Figure 4 is a two-chord sequence; play the notes of the C chord one at a time, low to high, followed by the notes of the G major 7 chord. This is a pattern of three notes followed by five, which means that the second bass note comes on the 'and' after the second beat, adding an unexpected rhythmic bump. Once again, we have the tension of the F sharp on the third (D) string sounding against the open G, combined with (for rock music) the unusual major-seventh sonority. Ideally, play this example with the pick.

Figure 5 introduces another two-bar groove, this time adding an open string with a two-note shape that can be moved around the guitar. The B minor chord is played for one bar; start on the bass note and make up any eight-note pattern.

In the second bar, play the two chords as four-note patterns, starting with the lowest note, adding in the other two strings and then re-picking the lowest note before sliding up. There is no root note in the third chord; we are relying on the bass player to play the low A under this chord.

All the above examples are based on early Smiths songs, but Figure 6 is inspired by a tune from one of Marr's later solo albums. The idea here is to play the whole chord with a down stroke on the downbeat and then fill the rest of the bar by picking between the top two strings.

Repeat the picking pattern as you work through the four chords; there's a satisfying arrival when you get to the D major chord. Finally, see if you can steal some of these ideas and come up with some of your own Johnny Marr-style arpeggios. G

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INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

The Berklee tutor, sessioneer and all-round funk genius talks dodgy batteries, the beauty of basic amps and why it's always important to know when it's lunchtime…

The moment it all started…
"My relative owned a classical guitar, and he showed me simple arpeggios and stuff like that. I was about 11 or 12. He didn't really play it that much, so he asked me if I wanted to borrow it. That was 40 years ago, but I can still remember riding home on the back of my father's motorbike with this guitar on my back! But then when it came to change the strings, I didn't know the difference between steel and nylon, so I just used the steel and one night the bridge just popped off! But that made me more curious about guitar!"

What's the one piece of gear you couldn't live without?
"It's hard! Currently, if I have my Kanji [Kawabata] guitar, the sunburst one, that's all I need! Just because that guitar is a truly amazing piece of work – every detail about it is just what I need. Every time I hold the neck, it's so perfect!"

The one that got away…
"I've sold some stupid things. I had a Strat that had very early EMG pickups, but then when I came to Berklee I was really into blues, so I was like, 'I don't need those in there, they're too modern!' So I sold them to a student and I wish I hadn't, because those were really, really early EMGs!"

My signature guitar would be…
"I already have my own Kanji signature guitar, which we've made a limited run of 25 of, so in a way, I'm set. But at the same time, if Fender ever wanted to make me one, I'd be so honoured!"

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar…
"I usually play a really simple phrase or just a bluesy melody – I don't play two-octave scales. I don't touch that! That's not a great thing to teach people, either, because students need to learn melody."

The best advice I've ever been given…
"You have to do one thing really, really well, before you can do three things. People often ask me: 'How can I become really versatile like you?' And the answer is well, yeah, you have to listen to a lot of music, but limit yourself to three albums a month. Because that way, you're forced to get deep with one sound and not just skim the surface of it. And it's the same with guitar, I teach chromatic scales the same way – no noise, no picking noise, very clean, very difficult. And you have to play everything with the rear pickup, not the front pickup. But once you can do that, everything else is easier."

My Spinal Tap moment…
"There's this band called Pigeons Playing Ping Pong, it's a weird name but they're a really great jam band, really popular. And they came to Boston and invited me to play a song. So I decided to just bring along my PRS Silver Sky and a Tube Screamer, because it's simple, right? Well, I checked the battery with a checker before I left, it was fine… but when I got on stage, there was something wrong with it – I'm going to have to buy better batteries next time!"

My guilty pleasure…
"I have all these vintage Fenders, I have a Two-Rock… but I just love my old Fender Musicmaster bass amp for practice. Now, this is *not* the greatest amp sound in the world, but it's very neutral tone-wise. It's nice and bright, so you can't hide anything when you're practising. I wish in Berklee we had this amp in every room, because people would probably get 10 times better!"

The first thing on my rider…
"I do a lot of gigs all over the world, but I always try to eat at a very specific time. So the first thing I ask is: 'What time is lunch?'… It's important!"

If I could just play one thing…
"Van Halen is the one, the guy who took rock guitar to the next level. Now, I play a lot of technical stuff, but I'm not really good at how he does those pinched harmonics with the whammy – I'd love to do that! But I just don't have the time, and it's really different to what I usually play. Maybe I should buy a Charvel and a Marshall and just learn to play *Eruption* note-for-note."

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